Opening the Door for God

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A MANUAL FOR PARENTS

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Foreword

As the years have gone by I have come to see more clearly the sources of the bed-rock convictions and motivations which guide my life. I find that most of the foundation stones were laid in early childhood by my parents and particularly by my father, who is, without knowing it, a great teacher. I continue to marvel how my parents could have given to their children independence of mind and marked individuality and yet have set so definitely the moral purposes which constitute a steady and relentless pull in their lives.

Through years of close association and intimate dealing with children and youth in camp and home and group, I have often come to know them better than their parents and have noted how fundamental for good or ill the parental influence is. I have been especially impressed with the significance of certain qualities which contribute to a constructive parental influence. Among these I place first an unfailing love and a genuine affection, a stern regard for truth and a loyalty to a few basic moral absolutes, a deep sincerity, some worthy goals for living, and the ability to treat children as persons in their own right and not as subjects, or possessions, or ways to personal gratification.

I wish that the attempt in this book to motivate parents might be a real " evangelism." And so I suggest to parents who use this book to read it first for the message it has for them. That is, not to read it

first with the question, What specific helps has it for my practice in guiding my children? but with the question, What must *I* be and do in order that I may help my children to grow spiritually? The book, I think, will give one emphatic answer: You must grow spiritually yourself.

This book has many concrete suggestions. If these are not so obvious or so numerous as you may wish, it is because I have been so deeply concerned for an emphasis on the side of the teaching that comes by living; so much concerned to make clear that what we are and what we are becoming must be naturally and consistently of one piece with what we profess and what we teach. This in order that the religious faith of our children may be *caught* and *taught*.

Now is a time in the world's history when if ever parents must believe that nothing which they can give their children counts very much except health of mind and body and the rule of God in their lives. What thoughtful person can bear to bring a child into this distraught world for a human existence that is merely human and merely existence? But who with faith in God and in the victory of Christ can fail to see what glorious opportunity it is to live for him in the world he is building?

Priority is now perhaps an overworked word, but parents have always had a priority. This book seeks to make more clear what it is.

"For every child moral and religious training that will enable him to stand firm under the pressure of life." — The Children's Charter of the White House Conference.

Chapter 1

Opening the Door

PARENTS would gladly guide their children in religious growth if they knew how. This book seeks to offer to parents guidance and inspiration in the religious nurture of their children. It is not a book of rules or of set patterns; it attempts to get at underlying principles. Basic in this approach are two propositions: First, religion is caught as well as taught. It must be in the common life, implicit, interwoven in the fabric of everyday living. Secondly, religion must also be made explicit; it must be taught.

Conversations Answering the questions of children is an art for which there are no exact instructions, no perfect formulas. Satisfying and helpful answers are a combination of reason and feeling. The relationship of parent and child and the degree of trust and understanding are determining factors. Attitudes are quickly sensed; even tone of voice is highly significant.

We must remember that with many children emotion is stronger than reason. They "think with their feelings." Quieting their fears is more a matter of dealing with emotions than a matter of logical reasoning. That which reveals the calm and confidence of someone whom they trust may be of far greater importance than any studied answer.

It is especially helpful to children to know that their questions will receive honest and respectful con-

sideration. It is a painful experience to feel that fears and anxieties must be covered up and real feelings hidden because parents are unsympathetic. To scoff at or to make light of the fears and doubts and curiosities of children is to betray their confidence and add to their misgivings.

Parents should think and study in order to give intelligent consideration to the problems children bring to them, but honesty, sympathetic attention, and emotional maturity are most essential.

"Who Made Me?" "Mother," asked six-year-old Jackie, "does God make everything?"

"Yes," his mother replied, "God makes everything."

"But daddy said that some men in a big factory made our car."

"That is true. Most of the things we use are made by people. But God made the things they use. God placed the iron and other metals in the earth and made the wood to grow in trees, and he made all the other things that men use to make cars and houses and toys. Men make many wonderful things, but they always start with things God has placed in the earth for men to use.

"And God has made men with minds so that they can plan and he has given them hands so that they can use these things. That is why we can say that God makes everything."

"Did God make me?" persisted Jackie.

"Yes, God makes these wonderful bodies of ours

so they can use the food we eat and the air and water he has put here for us, and so that we may grow large and strong. And God made our spirits to live in these bodies of ours. God made you and he made the body in which you live."

"Well, I guess God is pretty important," said Jackie, and he was off on a different train of thought, satisfied for the while with the answer to a question that may often return to puzzle him.

"If I Do Wrong?" "Daddy," said Jane anxiously, "Mary says that God watches us all the time and knows everything we do, and he will do something awful to us if we are bad."

"Well, Jane," said daddy, "it is true that God knows everything about us. It is true that he wants us always to do the best we can. But God loves us and he wants to help us. I don't think he likes to punish us, but perhaps he knows it is best for us sometimes."

"What will he do to us if we are bad?"

"For one thing, he lets us punish ourselves. God has made his world so that it runs according to certain rules. When we break the rules, we suffer. For example, God has given us fire to keep us warm and to cook our food and to do all sorts of useful things for us. God also has made us able to feel pain so that we will try to keep our bodies away from danger. Now if we are careless and get in the fire, we shall be burned and suffer pain. I don't think God wants us to get hurt and he is sorry when we are careless. But it is the only way he can teach us to be careful."

" But Mary says that God is angry when we do anything wrong and he always punishes us," said Jane.

" Jane," replied her father, " do you remember the other day when you disobeyed your mother and then did not tell the truth? You were punished by not being able to go out to play and by not being allowed to go over to Betty's place when you wanted to. Mother punished you, not because she does not love you, but because she does love you. She wants you to grow up to be fair and truthful.

" Perhaps you thought while you were being punished that mother and daddy did not love you. But when it was over and you were sorry, you found that we loved you all the time and that we cared for you the same as ever. Now God is like that; he is a loving Father. When we do wrong we feel that perhaps God is angry and does not love us. But when we are sorry and we try to do right we find that God loved us all the time and only wanted us to find out how to do right and how to feel right inside.

" We all can be sure that God loves us and will forgive us for any wrong if we are sincerely sorry. But he wants us to learn right from wrong and to be strong enough to do the right. I guess the worst thing about doing wrong all the time is that one can never be sure then that God can trust him. Probably if you did wrong all the time, you would not feel very close to mother and daddy or very sure that they love you, no matter how much they really do love you. Doing the best we know how makes us feel that we can trust each other and not feel that we have to hide anything. I think it is the same way with God.

"You must remember, Jane," said her father, "if God is present to see you do wrong, he is also present to help you to do right, and that is what he really wants to do."

"Where Is God?" Johnny was excited, fresh from what had apparently been a vigorous argument. "Mother, where is God? George says that God is up in heaven. Jimmie says God is everywhere. Sally says no one knows just where God is because no one can see him."

"Well, John," said mother calmly, "where do you think God is? Where does he seem to be when you say your prayers?"

Johnny paused a minute and then said thoughtfully, "Sometimes he seems a long way off, maybe up in the sky, maybe as far as the stars, or some place. And sometimes he seems quite near, just like a person, right in the room almost."

"Isn't that your answer, John? God is everywhere. When we think of this big world and the stars and all the wonderful things God has made, he may seem a long way off. You see, God is so great that he is much bigger than our minds can think and so we think of him in a lot of different ways and they are all partly true.

"But when we think of God as a person and as a loving Father, he just naturally seems very close, almost inside us sometimes. The poet Tennyson has said that God is closer to us than breathing and nearer than hands and feet.

"The most important thing, John, is to know that

we can always talk to God and that because we are his children he is always watching over us and is ready to give us strength and courage for living every day."

"Why Did God Let It Happen?" Lois was apparently worried. Finally she came out with her question. "Why did God let Janet get killed by an automobile? Mrs. Jones said in Sunday School that God loves everyone and cares for everyone and I can't see why God didn't take care of Janet."

"Let's think about it awhile," said her mother, "and maybe we can find some answer to your question.

"In the first place, we have to say that we do not know everything about God and we cannot always know why he allows things to happen as he does. But we do know that people have learned over a long, long time that what we think is not good often turns out to be the best after all. And so some people simply say that God knows best because he knows everything, and that whatever happens we should accept it as the best."

"But mother, it doesn't seem best for Janet to get killed. Surely God didn't want that to happen!"

"No, Lois. I don't think he did either. Suppose we look at it this way. God put power in his world in all sorts of forms and man has learned how to use it in good and bad ways. One use of power is in automobiles — to make them go so we can use them.

"But God has to trust man to use power and man often makes mistakes. If God did not trust him to use

his own mind, a man would not be a person, but only a kind of machine that God runs. So God has to let men learn for themselves. Sometimes men do not choose right, and then a terrible tragedy happens.

" Perhaps Janet was not careful enough. I am sure that God is more sorry than we can ever be, because I am sure that God wanted Janet to grow up to be a fine woman and do something in his world. But God knew that Janet could not grow up fine and strong if she had not learned how to take care of herself and think for herself. I think God feels very badly that the driver, if he was to blame, could not be trusted with the power that is in an automobile, and I think that God is very sorry that Janet, if she was careless, had not learned to be more careful."

" But mother, maybe it was an accident and neither the driver nor Janet could help it."

" We call it an accident because no one wanted it to happen, but still it was caused because someone failed to do the right thing. You know, Lois, I think we just have to believe that God always wants the best for all his children, and what we have to do is to try as hard as we can to know his will. When bad things happen, we know that someone has not been as thoughtful and careful as God wanted him to be."

When Death Comes Charles was a sensitive lad, highly impressionable. He burst into the room with a look of great anxiety on his face. " Mother," he cried, " Wilbur says that when Sally's mother died, they put her in a box and put her in the ground. He

says they do that with everyone. Mother, I don't want to be put in the ground."

"Come here, son," said his mother, taking him on her lap. "I guess we ought to have one of our good talks about what Wilbur told you. Perhaps he did not tell you the whole story."

"But mother, he said he knew it was so. They put her in a big box and buried it in the ground."

"You see," said Charles's mother, "Wilbur was telling you what they did with Mrs. Brown's body after it was so hurt by sickness that she couldn't live in it any more. Wilbur forgot to tell you that before Mrs. Brown's body was carefully put away, God had helped Mrs. Brown to find a new home, and that she had gone to be with God. I guess Wilbur forgot that God is able to give us a new house in which to live when this body we use now will not do any more.

"You see, Charles, God gives us these bodies to live in — for most of us it is for a long, long time. We take as good care of them as we can, but when they wear out because we are old or when they are hurt too badly by accident or sickness, then we just can't live in them any more and they are put away."

"But mother," persisted Charles, "would you let them put me in the ground?"

"Charles, dear, we really do not have to worry about that, because we hope you are going to live a long time in this body of yours and grow up to be big and strong. Mother and daddy are going to do all we can to help you. But if something should happen so that you could not use this body any more, you know that

we would lay it away lovingly. We will know that God has given you a new kind of house in which to live. It will be different, but it will be much more wonderful."

Charles was calm now, but he still looked puzzled. "Run out and play now, and we can talk again some other time," said his mother.

That night Charles's mother began the process of helping him to distinguish between "self" and the body in which the "self" lives.

"Charles," she said, holding up her hand, "what is this?"

"Your hand," said Charles.

"And this?"

"Your head."

And so they went over various parts of the body.

"You can't say that any of these parts of the body is mother, can you, Charles? You see, my body is not really I. It is just the house I live in.

"And when this house is no longer so that I can live in it, I know that God will give me a finer house, and so I don't worry about what will become of this house when that time comes."

The fact of death is a hard, cruel fact for the average child. It may be a bird or a loved pet; it may be a member of the family. But it is tragic and always leaves an indelible impression. The attitude of the parents is of tremendous significance. As a child I was often faced with the fact of death. We watched sick animals, tenderly cared for, but dying in spite of it all. It was always sobering and perplexing. I cannot

remember what my parents said when first I began to ask why. But I do know how they felt about it. Life was not cheap. It was useless to be sentimental, but it was right to be sad. Yet death was a part of life; it must come to all things. And it was often a release from pain and struggle.

There came a time when death invaded the family circle. Weeks of illness for a younger child, long night vigils, the deepening gloom as my parents fought a brave but losing fight for the life of a little son. Nothing else mattered. Necessary work went on as in a dream, but all thoughts, all hopes, all plans of the household centered around this fight for life. The end drew near, and with it came my greatest spiritual experience. My father, calm and strong, but with a great sadness which was majestic in its control, gathered about him the older children and tried to reveal, in simple language, the truth and prepare us for the shock. I remember his saying that God is good and God must know what is best. I recall his saying that suffering and pain would be over and that the baby would enter a life of joy and rest where pain and wrong would never touch him again. We who were left must be worthy of him; we must be brave and help each other and live well for that day when we shall see him again.

This is not an unusual experience, but it is significant. We saw God then as his love was made meaningful in the love and trust of parents. All of us, young and old, were helpless and sorrowing children before the throne of God. I think I began to see then that the

love of my parents could never fail under any circumstances and that if God's love were like that, only much greater, then he could always understand and forgive.

"What Would God Do?" A robbery had been reported in the neighborhood, and there had been considerable excitement. Joyce, aged seven, protested against going to sleep alone in her room unless the light were left on. Her mother was trying to allay her fears.

"But Joyce, you know that God is always near and he will care for you."

"Yes," said Joyce, "I know. But if a robber came into this room, just what would God do about it?"

History does not record what this mother said next. Perhaps she said, "Now let's have no more nonsense about robbers," and made a hasty retreat. But it is hardly fair to get God into a tight place and then run out on him. We cannot use God carelessly as an easy answer. It is doubtful if he does deal directly with robbers. The point here is a warning that to make God responsible may lead to skepticism and indifference. Parental watchfulness, a lock on the door, the fact that we do not keep large sums of money in the house, and other precautions are a part of the insurance against robbery. We must remember that God's care was also extended to the family whose home was robbed.

This does not mean that the assurance of God's care should not be given. But it is better in a case

like this to suggest the gift of courage than to imply direct action.

Some Valid Principles In trying to meet the needs of inquiring minds and maturing emotions, there are some principles that are worth keeping in mind.

First, intellectual honesty. It is unfruitful in the end to give our children points of view that are not acceptable to us and that we have already proved to be insufficient. What we give them must be the truth as we see it. Not the whole truth, perhaps; we do not always have the whole truth. But truth so far as we know it and so far as their needs go and their understanding permits.

Secondly, mere opinions divorced from life carry little weight. Children come to know where the truth lies with us, the truth upon which we act. The heart speaks louder than the tongue. Behavior in actual life situations will betray our real convictions or lack of convictions.

Thirdly, the best reasoning may be made ineffective or even harmful by wrong emotional coloring. Overanxiety, a strong desire to impose one's will, pressure to get outward assent, inability to bear opposition without emotional disturbance, false fears and vain hopes — all these may shine through our brave attempts at logic.

Fourthly, the child respects an open, inquiring, adventurous mind. We do not need to have the final word and the perfect answer. We need to be honest, earnest seekers after truth, with our children as our

close companions in the quest. We need to develop judgment as to when to speak with authority and some degree of finality and when to hold questions open for discussion and continuing thought and inquiry.

Fifthly, our greatest task is not to satisfy the mind, important as that may be, but to train the emotions and the will. " The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." We cannot impatiently teach patience. We cannot with faltering uncertainty teach faith. We cannot anxiously and fearfully teach courage. We cannot in pettiness and strife teach the love of our fellow men. We cannot without affection teach the abiding and sure love of God the Father.

Chapter 2

Parent and Child

MUCH, but by no means all, of the secularization of our times comes from indifference. It comes also from reaction. Many parents have revolted against the practice of teaching religion apart from life; of insisting on beliefs unrelated to experience. Sometimes conflict between profession and conduct in their own parents and teachers has led children to feel that belief doesn't much matter — it is what a man is that counts. These parents guide their children in good ethical conduct, but neglect all specific religious training. If they belong to the Church, they leave teaching to the Church. They do not have a very clear idea of what the Church is supposed to do. Nor do they realize that the Church cannot do the entire job.

Not only have people revolted against teaching a religion that is not practiced in everyday life, but they have come to believe that right living is the only religious influence a child needs. This is because so many fine people whom they know are nominal Christians and delightful friends and neighbors simply because they have been brought up in good homes and have attended the Sunday School. Religion was only indirectly a part of their family life. They did not receive much definite religious teaching, yet they seem to have fared pretty well.

Still another reason for neglect is the fact that parents have not known how to teach religion in a way

acceptable and helpful to children in a modern world. The child's knowledge of science and his rich and varied experience of life seem to make the task of satisfying his inquiring mind much more difficult. However, this makes religious teaching even more imperative.

We are learning today, moreover, that religion which is taught, but not woven into life by being lived every day in the family and the community, tends to become divorced from life and superficial, if not hypocritical. On the other hand, religion which is the result of indirect influence only, with no knowledge of beliefs, no content, no definite teaching, tends to disintegrate. It will not stand the test.

In the stress of life, a man must believe something. Faith needs knowledge. There are many fine Christian people who are the product of indirect religious influence in family, school, and community life, but they have no moorings. They have no clear knowledge of the Bible, no exalted and real idea of God, no kinship with Jesus Christ except a sort of twice-removed relationship. Their religion does not stand firm in the storms of life, and it is of little use to their growing children.

Yes, religion is caught. But it must be taught, too, else it loses its foundations, grows dim, and fails.

What Determines the Child's Religious Foundations? May we outline briefly some things that determine religious growth.

First, there is the experience the child has in his re-

lationships with persons who stand in positions of protection and care, of superior wisdom and authority. These persons are, first of all, parents and other members of the immediate family; then teachers, friends, and playmates. This experience with other persons is the most decisive factor. It is the first important factor in point of time, the earliest influence, and has the most lasting effects.

Secondly, there is the experience the child has in the world of wonders about him, and the explanations he is given of what he sees and feels and hears by those who have the responsibility for telling him what these things mean.

Thirdly, there are the religious sanctions — the faith, the trust, the fears, the superstitions behind the family and group life and thought into which he is inducted.

Fourthly, there is the formal teaching that may give the child orderly explanations of what his family or his Church believes. This includes knowledge of traditions and historical backgrounds, knowledge of sacred literature, and so forth.

Fifthly, there is the interpretation of life's deeper meaning that he is gradually able to develop for himself out of experience and thought and prayer, and with the guidance of parents, teachers and friends.

Religious Development Begins Very Early The first one of these religious factors, that is, relationships with other persons, is most important for the little child. Almost from birth he should begin to develop

his sense of something beyond self which loves and cares. This sense of otherness grows from his relationships with those who love and care for him. The child's response of filial trust to the love and patience, understanding and care of parents lays the earliest foundations for his response to God. The very small child begins to acquire his impressions of personality in this strange universe into which he has come from his parents, especially his mother. A prominent Christian psychiatrist, Dr. Smiley Blanton, has said, " Our idea of God is to a great extent derived from our relationship with, and our attitude toward, our parents." Tender care, patience, fairness, dependability, and a bond of love that cannot be broken — these are of inestimable worth in the religious foundations of a child's life.

The love of parents has a redeeming power. It is the very insufficient but real reflection of the love of the Heavenly Father. In fact, it is a part of the Father's love, one of his greatest gifts. How unfortunate when the chain is broken, and parental love is not sustained by the love of God; when there is no consciousness of the continuity of that love; when the failure of parental love makes it more difficult for a child to see and understand the love of God.

We have said that almost from the earliest moment the child begins to get his sense of God from his experience with those persons who care for him. Trust or suspicion, confidence or fear, love or hate — these emotional patterns are being laid against which religious teaching must later be done. We do not wait

until the child is old enough to understand before we begin his religious training; we cannot wait. Only the formal training is delayed; the foundations are laid very early indeed.

Unconscious Influence Day by Day As the growing child has an ever-widening awareness of his sharing in the common life of the family, he begins to have on his lips an everlasting " Why? " In the answers, spoken or implied, we begin to build deep into the child's consciousness the sense of what life means to us. Are we shallow, inconstant, selfish, afraid? The child knows it unconsciously long before he knows the meanings of these words. Is this parental love real and strong and absolutely dependable? He senses the answer to that question, too.

The roots of parental influence are deep in our fundamental attitudes toward life. What views of the worth and meaning of life do we have? Are we at home in the universe? These and other far-reaching questions are being answered day by day for our own children, whether we know it or not. Are we daily conscious of the fact that we are also children of God? The child will sense that fact. He will know soon that this protection and love, wisdom and authority which he has learned to trust is not ultimate, but that it, in turn, rests back on something beyond. He begins to look beyond with his parents to Someone who loves and sustains them.

There is nothing mystical about this; it is a common experience. It ought to be a commonplace idea

to Christians for whom Jesus made clear the concept of the Fatherhood of God. And no word of Jesus has greater implications for parents than these, " If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? " We parents are children of God; upon us rests the sacred privilege of translating the love of God into life for our children.

The Roots of Our Teaching We may as well squarely face a difficult and perplexing problem. Parents cannot give to children what they do not have themselves. They cannot radiate a religious faith if they have none. They cannot teach if they do not know. It is futile to teach what we accept with our minds and do not know with our hearts. If what we have said about the basis of religion in parent-child relationships is true, then there must be some religious foundations in parents' lives if the child is to have them.

These foundations may be of a very simple and elemental sort. The belief that God is, that he is the creator and sustainer of life, that he is present and acting in his universe, that man is subject to his power and his judgment, that he seeks man with his redeeming love — any or all of these ideas may be accepted and made the working basis of one's plan of life and thought. The absolute minimum is a real sense of the presence of God making a difference in life.

Although it is perhaps better than nothing, it is tragic to see parents trying to give a child a religion

that is no longer vital, creative, and growing in their own lives, just because they feel an obligation to do something about his religious training. This does not mean that parents have to be pious in order to teach their children, nor that they need to have reached any state of perfection. But they do need to be honest intellectually and willing to grow themselves. Our deep-lying motives, not our surface attainments and pretences, are known to our children.

Let us illustrate this problem. Some young parents, concerned with doing their best for their children, had decided that they must do something about religious training. The father had had some childhood instruction, fragments of which had stayed with him, but his religious development might be said to have been arrested in childhood. He was pretty thoroughly materialistic and worldly-minded, with some rather superstitious and inconsistent ideas of God. The mother was even more untaught in things religious, with only a few jumbled impressions from early and irregular Sunday School attendance.

These young people were good parents, good friends, and good neighbors. They loved their children, and there was fine fellowship in the home. But the religious training they began to give their children was resurrected from their own childhood memory. They were not teaching their children out of any present living religious experience of their own. They were not interpreting to their children a growing experience of God present in their own lives. They were teaching their children to pray, but they themselves

did not pray. They were saying things to their children about God and Jesus that had no real meaning for themselves. With the best of intentions, they were giving to their children fragmentary impressions, doomed eventually to be of little more significance than the fairy tales, Mother Goose rhymes, and folklore.

In this instance, and there are many like it, we have a discontinuity which is serious. These parents are giving to their children love and protection, which is basic; we must not underrate it. But the love and guidance of children should be in itself a religious experience. Their love and care are not being caught up in a living, vital, religious faith to sustain and exalt their lives.

Such religious teaching as these parents are giving is not likely to become for their children a living reality. These children are not going to be able to sense, as children should be able to do, that what they experience of love and care in their parents is sustained by what their parents experience of the love and care of God. They will not see that what their parents believe, understand, and live by, and what their parents are trying to interpret to them, are all part of one picture.

" Third-generation religion " one might call a religion that is just handed on. In the process, interpretation comes to have a little less relation to living; ideas have a little less meaning in terms of life; words have a little less application to present experience.

These young parents just described need to realize

their own lack and set out to correct it. Let them honestly attempt to make God real in their own lives. They and their children can search and grow together. Then their children will not grow up with only a vague, sentimental attachment to religious ideas that are associated in their minds with some pleasant relations to their parents. Nor will they grow up with the impression that religious practices are for little boys and girls, but not for grown folks like daddy and mother.

Guard Against Fear Fear is a normal experience in the life of any child. After all, this is a rather terrifying universe for anyone. It makes a great difference how we handle fear in the experience of the child, so far as his religious development is concerned. There is, for instance, the matter of storms — thunder, lightning, wind, and rain. Long before we can tell our children anything about storms, they have sensed what we feel. If we fear and are anxious and upset, the child will tend to feel as we feel. It is not a very long step from such a nervous conditioning to the impression that an angry God sends storms to punish, or that there is something essentially evil in any violence of nature.

The parent who by calmness and trust has conquered fear has the best opportunity to show God at work. The storm sometimes destroys, but the storm is beautiful. The wind howls, but it carries the rain clouds over the land and scatters the seeds of flowers.

We must not belittle or scoff at fear. Repressing fear

by simply making the child ashamed to show fear is not helpful. He must be helped to overcome fear with trust and understanding. An absolute prerequisite to the knowledge that God cares and protects is the unshakable assurance that parents care and can be depended upon. To the little child who learns to know that mother's love and concern never leave him, even when she is not near, the eternal presence of God is more readily comprehended.

A child had somehow become afraid of the darkness; he was terrified to be left in the dark at night. His mother took him to the window and talked about the stars. Always there, they become visible, she explained, only when it is dark on the earth. Just as they are always there, so God is always present. God makes the dark as well as the light. He makes darkness so birds and animals can rest; darkness so that we can see the sunset and the sunrise. Darkness is a part of God's great plan of a beautiful world.

Another mother listened for night noises and identified them. It became a game — the wind whistling in the trees, the night owl, the cricket. God's music, she said, to help sing us to sleep.

But whatever the cause of unrest and fear, the parents' opportunity to build foundations of trust is great. No boastful assertion that daddy and mother are not afraid and baby should not be afraid either will lay this foundation, but a comradeship in a common trust, because they are bound together in love and all are children of a loving Father who cares for them all.

And They Shall Have Joy If God is to be made real in times of fear and tragedy, he must be real in times of joy, well-being, and thanksgiving. Too often our teaching is one-sided — God is all "sweetness and light," a fair-weather God, who sends birds and flowers and picnic weather. Or God is never called in except when his children are in trouble. If the child is to realize the presence of God in his moments of fear and loss, and turn to God when he needs help, he should feel God's presence in his times of greatest joy.

The parents should sense the moments of ecstasy when a child wants the whole world to know and share his joy and use its religious values wisely. We may stop to thank God in a little thank-you prayer. We may say that God is glad, too, for his love makes him happy when we are happy. For older children, it is well to show that God has made us so that we can be happy in order that we can understand his care, and that he has made a world in which there could be more happiness if we would always do good things and think good thoughts.

Chapter 3

"Our Father Who Art in Heaven"

FROM time to time investigators have sought to find out what boys and girls think about God and have received some pretty shocking answers to their questions. Unfortunately these answers do not seem to represent the minority. What children from Christian homes and from our Sunday Schools think about God is enough to make us pause.

Dr. Grieg-Smith asked a large number of children for written replies to the question, " If a boy or girl tells a lie and is not found out, will he be punished? " Most of the answers revealed an unchristian idea of God. " We may get run over by an accident, but God has made the accident." " God could punish him and make him always afraid and very unlucky." " God might let his house be struck by lightning or something fall on him and kill him." These are samples of the answers.

A few years ago fifth-grade teachers were asked to find out what their pupils thought about God. A majority of the answers contained statements like these: " If I should do wrong, God might make my baby sister get sick and die." " God might make a tree fall down on us." " God writes down our bad deeds in a book and punishes us if we do too many." " God has

one eye in the middle of his forehead and sees everything we do."

We need not be unduly alarmed that children have such notions or that these ideas should be among the many concepts from which they are selecting and building their knowledge of God. But unfortunately these are all some children have. Accompany such ideas of God with an emotional experience of fear and you have the basis of an uncreative, unrewarding religion — to be cast off, or to be replaced painfully, or to haunt one through life. What sort of concepts of God is your child forming?

Whence These Ideas of God? The sources of wrong ideas, such as those just given, are many. Children get them from the false notions of parents and from careless, unthinking remarks. They get them from an overemphasis on Old Testament stories, badly selected and wrongly used. It is amazing how many Christians have an Old Testament God — an idea of God from the stories of a primitive people to whom God had not yet been able to reveal himself fully, rather than the God revealed through the prophets and in Jesus Christ. Not that the Old Testament does not reveal exalted insights into the nature of God; it does. But the New Testament is absolutely necessary to complete the picture. About the place of the Old Testament in the religious education of children, we shall speak further in a later chapter.

Children get false ideas from a jumble of family

conversation, fairy tales, irregular or ineffective Sunday School teaching, Christmas stories, radio programs, and remarks of playmates. How is the idea of God to be made to grow and expand until it becomes adequate for the conquest of life? For the great majority, this will not be done unless parents do it!

Just in passing, may we explode that ridiculous theory widespread among modern parents and expressed by one mother thus: " We are not giving our children any formal religious training until they are old enough to choose for themselves. It seems so unfair to give a child ideas of God and religion when he is too young to choose and discriminate." And in what sort of vacuum is the child to be reared until this age of discretion is reached?

Children get some notion of God even from the very childlike tendency to form some explanation for phenomena. There are many things happening around them all the time which need an explanation and a meaning. If they are not getting a helpful concept of God, then they may be getting ideas of God as the policeman, the bogy man, the tyrant, or the capricious satisfier of selfish wants. This sort of God comes from false teaching or from no teaching at all.

Children ask equally difficult questions in all other fields and often receive painstaking answers from parents who postpone religious questions until some later time. The child's experience and some degree of satisfying explanation must be brought together. We may be sure that the experience is becoming associ-

ated with some sort of explanation; the child is finding some answer to his questions. His answers to all questions that concern life have a bearing on religion.

Children hear about God at school and on the playgrounds. In some instances, although parents have been carefully refraining from religious teaching " until children were old enough," the children have been getting the worst sort of superstitions from nursemaids or from the child next door. We do not refrain from teaching good manners until children are old enough to decide whether or not they want to be gentlemen or ladies; we carefully teach basic family customs and ideals. Some parents who are afraid of imposing a religious pattern are painstakingly imposing a secular pattern. They send their children forth with the false belief that they are ready for life. Then when pain, sorrow, and death strike, they have no foundations.

What Shall We Teach About God? Yes, someone is teaching our children about God. What shall we teach? And how?

For the very youngest, the first impressions should be of the God of loving care and protection. He is to be talked about and experienced — talked about in the simplest, most natural terms, identified with the joys and discoveries, the fears and sorrows, the hopes and fulfillments of the everyday world of childhood. Said one small child: " Mother, is God as nice as you? If he is, he must be awfully nice." What a tragedy that many children never think of God as being nice like

mother at her best! They think only of an angry God of justice, entering their lives when they do wrong! What a compliment to parents that God can begin to form the child's conception of himself as an enlarged picture of a parent!

God had a purpose when he created a great capacity for love between parents and children. We must ask ourselves: Do we stand between our children and God? Or does God shine through us? Do we give a new meaning to family ties as we sanctify them in the presence of God, all children of one Father who is as " nice " as mother and infinitely " nicer "? Love and trust in the family become the child's framework for his concept of God. The most cruel and damaging of all punishment is the threat not to love the offending child. No parent should ever say, " If you aren't good, mother (or daddy) won't love you." It is untrue; it creates fear; it is negative and emotionally bad. It is even worse to say, " If you are not good, God won't love you."

Yet the child must learn how wrong cuts him off, not from forgiving love, not from continued care and protection, but from full fellowship and the sense of perfect unity. Re-enacted every day is the proof of a suffering God in the bleeding hearts of parents over the failures of a child, and in the parents' willingness to trade even life itself for the welfare and " wholeness " of their children. If this parental love is real and spiritually sustained, the child will know it. I am past forty, long separated from my parental home, yet I know, even now, as I have always known, that nei-

ther my father nor my mother would hesitate to give his or her life for mine. I know that they would be identified with me in the anguish of any grief or disaster. I have seen them go into the valley of sorrow and suffering and shame and regret with their children, with a love that cannot be broken. Yet they have always been clear in distinguishing right from wrong. Punishment was just and the burden of wrongdoing or wrong judgment fell alike on parent and child. God is like that.

When the psalmist said that even if his father and his mother should forsake him, the Lord would not forsake him, he still used a human reference. Had he not known the tenacious love of parents he would not have dared the comparison. He paid honor both to true parenthood and to God!

God, the Creator At an early age the child may begin to know God, the Creator. This wondrous world opening up before him — how many of its mysteries are crying out for explanation! Who? Why? What? When? The sensitive and alert child begins to seek out the meaning of his world. If he finds a helpful response, he begins to build at the very beginning his pattern for living.

Biological and physical well-being have rightly been stressed as of great importance for the small child. But he has a mind, too, and a soul! Just as improper attention to bodily needs may physically impair him, so improper attention to mental and emotional needs may dwarf him spiritually. A universe for

the searching mind and the struggling spirit in which the God of Jesus is the source and the end of being — this is the rightful heritage of every child. There are, to be sure, great problems involved in talking to the young child about God. We must be very simple, careful of our words, and especially careful of the emotional content we put into the words by voice or expression. A real sin against childhood is to talk of God with an habitual emotional stress that does not represent the adult's true attitude. The child should begin early to identify God with an ever-present, ever-acting life force seen every day in the wonders of God's universe. The child personalizes everything; to him the Creator will be personal.

Reverence for Life We have been told often that basic to the child's religious development is the sense of awe and wonder. If we care for the spiritual sensitivity of our children and if we would lay solid foundations for a spiritual approach to life, then we must cultivate awe, wonder, and reverence in the presence of beauty. Science and religion are never likely to be in conflict for the child who early sees God's handiwork in the ordered life of nature — in flower and bird, sunset and rainbow, the crystal of rock, the snowflake, the storm, the rolling sea, the drifting cloud, the mysterious functioning of his own marvelous body.

At home on the farm there was always new life coming into being. New colts and calves, new pigs and chickens, all to be cared for carefully because they were valuable, but for a much more valid reason than

that. Our parents loved growing things and loved to see them well cared for. Almost as soon as we children could walk, we shared in caring for all these animals. We were taught to be kind to them, to think of them as creatures with feelings and with rights. They were "ours," but they were more than that — they were entrusted to our care, and we were stewards responsible and held accountable.

Then there were the innumerable wild things — the duck nesting by the pasture pond and the prairie chicken or pheasant in the meadow, to be carefully avoided with the mowing machine if we discovered her nest in time.

But most wonderful of all was the great miracle of spring. I recall the great meaning there was for me as a boy in Lowell's lines:

> "And what is so rare as a day in June?
>   Then, if ever, come perfect days;
> Then Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,
>   And over it softly her warm ear lays."

I can thank my early training for this deep appreciation of what the poet was trying to say. For spring was a miracle — the earth bursting into life all around us and that hustling, expectant partnership the farmer has with nature and with God, his pledge of faith, his preparing of the soil, cleaning of the seed, and the sowing of it deep and well. No carelessness! If nature is to do her part, we must do ours.

Father had more than the scientific attitude of a

good farmer; he had a sense of integrity and of stewardship. If one would receive, he must give. Nature cannot be cheated; she demands full co-operation and devotion. When we had done our best we had our reward, even though the crop failed. If we had not done our best, our gain was undeserved. Here was a religious attitude toward labor. Watching for the rains, welcoming the growing warmth of the sun, and waiting the day when someone would come from the field with the glad news, " I could see the rows today " — these are part of a cherished memory. Hail and frost, wind, rain, and drought took their toll. It was hard to understand sometimes. But we were helped to understand that beyond our finite reckoning God has a plan, and he is just. We must measure our joys against our sorrows and count our many blessings " one by one," as the old hymn admonishes.

Beauty Is Where You Find It A person who loves children and has given many years of her life to teaching them was riding the elevated train through the neglected area of a large city. She was aware that an elevated train often gives one the worst view of the city — the back doors of tenements, dirty alleys, garbage cans, and junk piles. She was regretting that so many children must grow up among such surroundings, when suddenly she spied a tiny garden on a roof top — a splash of beauty upon a drab landscape. And there was a small child watering the plants!

"It is difficult," she thought, " very difficult to bring beauty to these bare and smoke-drenched streets,

but it is not impossible if one has a love of beauty in his heart. I wonder if some mother is determined that her child shall know the joy of companionship with growing things and have a chance to see the face of God in the beauty he has made."

A mother of small children in the city, talking of her feeling that the city need not rob children of an experience of beauty in nature or of the mystery of pulsating, ever-renewing life, said, "I always try to keep some growing things in the house and try to help the children to love and understand them. I think it important to get some new seeds or bulbs frequently. Even a sweet potato growing in a bowl of water provides fascinating evidence of life and makes a lovely plant."

Many city parents who cannot go often to the country make it a practice to take their children frequently to the parks to see and talk about plants and birds. Others find that the public schools make a constant effort to bring to children an awareness of beauty and an appreciation of living things, and that an alert parent can help to give religious meaning to these experiences.

The mystery of life! The sense of seeing, each fresh new day, the Creator at work in a world of wonders past all our understanding, but increasingly revealed to those who approach in reverence! This is the rightful heritage of every child. To stand in awe and wonder before the mystery of life, hand in hand with adults whom he loves and trusts and who are helping him to see and appreciate — this is one of his greatest heritages.

It may be that it is " scientific " to think that we can explain everything. Certainly we should make the most of knowledge, for that, too, is sacred. But we have done our children no service when we have given them the false sophistication of thinking they can explain the inexplicable. Many a modern has an explanation for everything and understands nothing. Because he thinks he understands, he does not know the depths of his ignorance. He has no need of God.

God Here and Now It is far wiser to have the child get some of his earliest impressions of God as living and acting here and now in the child's small but ever-expanding world, than to have him first learn about God only from Bible stories that may leave the impression that God did all his great deeds among men a long time ago. There are thousands of Christians who know how God participated in the wars of the chosen people and yet have no sense of God acting in history today. Whatever limitations there may be to our children's ideas of God, we want them to know a living God with whom they can walk and talk in the course of every day.

We want the child to know God as personal, yet we moderns have often recoiled at childlike pictures of God as a person. Children have all sorts of concepts — God as a great giant, infinitely strong; God as a kind old man with a long white beard; God as a king on a throne up in the sky. Not adequate, we say. Of course not. But it is worse if the child, like one modern philosopher, sees God as a sort of " oblong blur."

We need not fear too much the child's limited and

concrete ideas of God. These are quite natural to children, no doubt. God is a Person. We do want our children to have a personal God. That they think of him as a person very much in the human mold is not strange. What we need to be concerned about is what sort of Person God is to the child. And this, may we repeat, is why we have attached so much importance, first, to the experience the child has with persons, especially parents; and secondly, to the way in which he is led to make this experience the foundation of his natural approach to God.

What sort of person? That is the vital question. Is God fearsome, cruel, vindictive? Is he ruthless, unfeeling, and a ghostly intruder? Is he a spy, policeman, and recorder of evil deeds? Or is he the best kind of person the child can imagine? A kind, loving person, who understands and cares? A just person who uses his power for good purposes? A person who gathers up within himself all the goodness and power and love we can know?

This concept of God can continually grow and expand to take in the depths and the heights of life. Crude pictures of God as a person become refined and later spiritualized; but God the Personal remains.

God Is Spirit It is unnecessary and perhaps unwise to talk to the small child about God as a Spirit. It is too likely to identify him with the unreal, the make-believe. Our words about spirit mean little to the small child.

The child has a sense of spirit, nonetheless. Unseen

things are very real to him. He needs no name for this. He talks to imaginary characters, plays with imaginary friends. They seem very real. We can never reason with the child or persuade him to believe what we think he should believe. This will not make belief meaningful and creative in his own life. We must guide him as he forms his own beliefs from his own experience and from such of our experience as we are able to share with him.

Parents should take time to talk to God with their children. Speak of God's care and love in the daily round of family living. Take time and thought to answer all important questions in such a way as to send even the small mind back toward the ultimate ground of truth. Awaken a sense of awe in the presence of the wonderful and the beautiful. Express a reverence for life in all its forms, always naturally and quietly making God the Author, always giving a sense of meaning and purpose behind all that we see and touch and feel. Parents who help their children thus will be continually amazed at the capacity of the child to form an exalted idea of God and to practice his presence.

God Is Love We have put chief emphasis thus far upon the idea of God as our loving Heavenly Father, Creator, and Friend. And rightly so. Love, and not fear, is the true basis of the Christian faith. But it may be admitted at once that the child must also learn early of the God of order and justice. There is no real conflict here.

God who is to be obeyed and followed positively

and not negatively through life must be a God who loves and is loved, not one who is only feared. Obedience which is spiritual is grounded in love. But love does not rule out justice. In good family relationships between parents and children, order and justice are based on love. In the same way, a strong sense of the justice and righteousness of God has its most sure foundation in the knowledge of his all-inclusive, all-comprehending goodness and love.

Said a bewildered person recently, " How is it possible to believe in a just and loving ruler of a world like this? " To which another replied: " It is only possible to explain a world like this by a just and loving God. For this is a world in which men are paying the just penalties for their sins and are being brought back within the forgiving compassion of God through the atonement of suffering."

God Is Just The child must begin early to learn that in an ordered universe the breaking of natural laws brings pain. The fire burns. Rightly used, it gives light, heat, and power, and it cooks our food. Wrongly used, it destroys. The plant has the power of growth, but it must have soil and water and care. And God has so made us that when we do right and think right thoughts and keep right with our fellows, we may be happy. But when we do wrong, we suffer. If we lie, people cannot trust us. Worse still, we cannot respect ourselves. Said a small boy, " Mother, if I took something and no one missed it or saw me take it and no one ever knew it, would that be stealing? " " God

would know," said his mother. His first lesson — the lesson that one cannot escape from his conscience.

God does not just watch to catch us in the wrong, but he knows and he cares. He lets us decide because he wants us to be strong. When we decide wrongly, he is hurt and he suffers with us. He forgives when we ask forgiveness if we are truly sorry, and he is happy when we are " whole " and feel right again. Thus we may reason with children.

The parent who sees and feels this attitude toward God has something that the child can understand. But the parents must understand it first. My child and I are bound inseparably by the ties of love, yet the child is a person in his own right. I cannot possess or rule him. I can help him to possess and rule himself. His failures are my failures. Although I must punish, I do it with sorrow, if my love is strong. And if I am the right kind of parent, I am inwardly ashamed that I am not worthy to judge or to punish. Such integrity the child will intuitively grasp and under these circumstances, punishment will not break the bonds of love.

Every worthy parent must learn to administer justice. But if he must punish he will regret that he is so unworthy to do so and will repent for his failures that made punishment necessary. Every child's failure is, in part, a parent's failure. Forgiveness and reconciliation will always follow, and the child will have an experience which does not remain only in the realm of a merely personal score between two persons, one of whom happens to have power and authority. Here is something which touches the deep principles

of living and the laws of life, something which has significance in the sight of God. The element of justice in dealing with children is highly important in building their trust and faith in God.

Discipline Has Religious Meaning Wrong ideas of God come often from the mishandling of discipline. Only the fairest and most just discipline can safely be associated with the idea of God. Investigation has shown time and again that revolt against God in adolescence is generally a revolt against unjust parental authority associated with religious sanctions.

A very small boy used, without any sense of their meaning, swear words he had picked up from the men about the farm. His parents had more knowledge of a God of wrath than of a Heavenly Father. They thought of God as being more concerned with taboos than with the spirit of a child. They punished the lad severely and told him that God would let him be "burned eternally in hell" if he continued to say such words. This is stupid and tragic. In the first place, the hitherto meaningless words were thus firmly fixed in the boy's mind by this stormy experience. But more than that, what right has anyone to interpret God so to a child?

A child must be taught that God "knows" our thoughts and deeds. Remember that the Bible puts much stress on the thoughts — "as [a man] thinketh within himself, so is he." But we parents must not make God the author of our own opinions or reinforce our petty discipline by appeal to him. Certainly

God would be up to small business, indeed, reinforcing our poor opinions and our petty show of authority. We are subject too! Let us never forget that. Our judgment of our children is a judgment upon ourselves.

Children must come to see why wrong is wrong. They must be helped to see the inwardness of sin. We must help them to overcome evil with good and to have the positive goodness of one who loves the right, rather than the negative goodness of one who only fears the consequence of evil.

We have no right to interpret God as anything less than the highest we can conceive. And that highest is the Father of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4

"I Came that They May Have Life"

IF LITTLE mention of Jesus has been made up to this point, it is not because he has not come often to mind. For indeed, it is impossible to give the approach to God which has been presented without reference to Jesus, the supreme revelation of God. It is the God revealed by Jesus about whom we have been thinking.

It is taken for granted that the God of loving care — God, the Creator, God, the all-wise, the understanding, sustaining, and redeeming God — whom parents have been urged to show forth in their own lives and about whom parents are urged to teach, naturally, sincerely and simply, is for them the God of Jesus. If he is not, then it is not Christianity about which we are talking.

How, then, does Jesus figure in the religious training of our children? This book takes the point of view that young children should not be disturbed and confused by having adult problems of theology thrust upon their minds. What is needed more than anything else is to let the character, personality, and teaching of Jesus speak for themselves. The child needs no arguments about Jesus' power and knowledge; he needs no "proofs" from miracles. He needs plain, unmistakable pictures of the crystal clear personality

of Jesus. He needs stories of Jesus who called little children unto him, who healed sick people, and fed hungry people. As a solid foundation for religious growth, your child needs an understanding of Jesus that can help him to understand the kind of God Jesus tried to reveal. He does not need just now the Lamb "slain from the foundation of the world"; he needs a Hero to worship, an example of all that is good and best, an ever-present Companion, a Friend and a Teacher. Suppose we try first to have our children know Jesus as children of his own day might have known him. For instance, those children whom he blessed.

"I Am the Way" The religion of Jesus is a Way of living. It is living in the spirit of love toward God and toward other persons. Love for God and love for man, said Jesus, are the first commandments. He lived on those terms. Someone has said that Jesus lived and taught these fundamental principles:

The Fatherhood of God.
The brotherhood of man.
The value of every individual as a child of God.
The law of love as the law of life.
The way of service as the way of life.
The Kingdom of God as the goal of life.

Jesus lived these basic truths; by word and by deed he taught them. If you will go over them thoughtfully, you will see that they may be taught in relation to experience. One has a feeling that the children of Jesus' day never had much trouble understanding him. The

scholars, the persons who tried to make him fit into their theology or rejected him because he didn't conform to it, had trouble understanding him. But surely the children could understand. They felt the radiance of his life. They saw him living in the experience of every day. They saw his way of trust and love, courage, self-sacrifice, and serenity of soul. They heard his simple words which we often make so difficult. Surely they understood!

Our problem with children, then, is not so much to interpret Jesus as to let him speak for himself. We wish to build attitudes of fellowship, understanding, and loyalty that will later serve as foundation stones for mature ideas and decisions. Jesus of the simple Gospel stories is one who speaks to the child's heart and to the child's understanding. Do not be so much concerned with what men have taught about the teaching of Jesus that you obscure for your child the radiance of his life and his message.

From the time our children begin listening to stories, we may tell them stories about Jesus. Many skilled teachers believe that the stories of Jesus, the Man, should come first. They believe that it is better that small children have as their first deep impressions those that will continue to serve them later on. This seems psychologically sound. Children who are learning to know and trust adults in the persons of their parents had best have their first deep impressions of Jesus as a strong and beautiful adult and not as a baby. It is interesting to note in this connection that it is some years before the child begins to ask,

" Mother, tell me about when you were a little girl," and then it is only if the child feels great respect and affection for her.

There is an abundance of helps for parents in giving the stories of Jesus. Many writers have retold the stories for children of different ages. Some of these sources are listed in the bibliography at the end of this chapter. It is not enough, however, simply to read the stories or to give the child a Bible storybook as soon as he is old enough to look at pictures or to begin to read himself. Many parents have done this, thinking they have fulfilled their duty, and are rather proud of the fact that they have given their children some " religious education." Again we say, " Better than nothing." But the unguided use of Bible storybooks along with other children's books may have little real religious value.

How to Use the Stories Parents need to have enough knowledge of Jesus to have a consistent point of view themselves. They need to select and use stories discriminately. These stories are not simply to entertain or to stimulate imagination or to teach ideas; they are to form impressions and attitudes as foundations for a growing appreciation and understanding. Are our children to know a man Jesus who was very kind and gentle and even sentimental, but with no calm, deep, elemental strength and courage? Are they to have a child Jesus who will always remain a child? Or are they to have a growing Person, growing " in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men "? Simply

reiterating the miracles and telling how " wonderful " he was will not make Jesus real. We ourselves must feel this reality. Does the story ring true for you? Is this the Jesus you know and follow? Is this the Jesus you want your child to know and follow?

We are here contending that we should not expect some writer to give our child a full appreciation of Jesus through the medium of a storybook alone. It is important that we ourselves give him the picture of Jesus with these stories as our tools. Steep yourself in these stories of Jesus. Make him live for yourself. Tell the stories as well as read them. Turn often from the child's storybook to the Bible itself.

More important still, do not use the stories of Jesus detached from life; use them in connection with the experiences of every day. They are not fairy tales, but reports from life. They have meaning for life. Do not read too much into the stories. Do not assume that the child has the same problems with the stories that adults may have. But think the stories through so as to be able to give, so far as possible, honest answers to the questions children may ask.

It is better to say that we do not know than to give a false or careless answer. We want to open windows for the mind, not to close them. Dogmatic teaching which discourages questioning and search for wider meaning is untrue to the spirit of Jesus. Let the child's mind work. However, we are not striving simply for open-mindedness; rather, we are concerned with developing attitudes of trust and confident exploration in the search for truth.

Safeguarding Impressions A young Sunday School teacher was telling a class of beginners the story in which Jesus walked on the water. She was making it very graphic indeed. One statement was somewhat startling. She said, " Wasn't it wonderful that Jesus could walk right on top of the water, and he never even got his feet wet! " Aside from the question as to whether or not this story is of value to small children, it would seem that the teacher was anticipating questions of older children or adults. She was adding unnecessary graphic details, so as to emphasize the spectacular and not the greatest values. It would seem that if the story is to be used at all with children so young, the emphasis should be on the faith and courage of Jesus, his calmness in the storm, his desire to help and comfort his frightened disciples.

Let us look at the story of the feeding of the five thousand as it is told in John's Gospel. This is a beautiful story, and children love it. It may be told over and over again. Suppose we try it somewhat as follows:

Once there was a little boy who loved Jesus and liked to go to see him and listen to the stories he told. One day he said, " Mother, many people are going out of the village into the country where people are coming to talk to Jesus. I want to go too."

" You may go," said his mother, " but it is quite far and you will get hungry before you get back. I will fix a lunch for you to take along."

The little boy watched his mother as she wrapped up the lunch. There were five pieces of bread and two

little fish to eat with the bread. But the boy didn't pay much attention to his lunch then. He was in a big hurry to get started. He could hardly wait for it.

When the lunch was ready, he hurried off to the country and finally came to the place where a large group of people were listening to Jesus tell stories. He was so interested in listening to Jesus talk that he forgot all about his lunch.

When the sun began to go down, Jesus was sorry for the people who had been listening all day and had had nothing to eat. One of the disciples said to him, "There is a boy here who has five pieces of bread and two fish." Jesus told him to have all the people sit down, and then he took the bread and fish and when he had thanked God for them, as he always thanked God for all good things, he broke them into pieces and asked some of his helpers to give them to the people to eat.

Some teachers or parents might tell the story to very young children with great emphasis on the power of Jesus to turn a little food into much food, dwelling in detail on the large number of people who were present, how very hungry they were, and what large baskets of food were left over. It is doubtful if these are the best points of emphasis for children. Certainly we do not wish to obscure the things to which they more naturally respond — the boy's opportunity and willingness to share and especially Jesus' kindness to all the people.

Because we want our children to know Jesus Christ throughout life as a friend and guide, an example and

ideal, we do not want them to see a strange figure who did only unusual things — not first of all a wonder-worker, but rather a beautiful, strong person, gentle, kind, and true; not a ghostly figure, but one who shared the common life, in its work and play, joy and sorrow.

This is the Jesus who can and will mean something to children and through whom we can show them what God is like. If children have been carefully taught in this way about Jesus and have learned to love him, they will have little difficulty in adolescence with Christ, the Son of God, who is their Saviour.

Remember that the stories must come through the crucible of your own thought and experience. The child must see that these stories have present meaning for you, if he is later to think of them for his adolescent and adult life. You have an opportunity to interpret, as the child may progressively understand, the Jesus whom your child can love and follow.

Thoughtful parents may have considerable trouble with the Easter story. With its background of the cross, the Crucifixion of Jesus is perplexing and disturbing to sensitive children. Some parents prefer that their children hear little of it until they are old enough to understand. Some Churches do not teach small children the story of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, but make Easter time a rejoicing in new life and the evidence of God's power to make all things new again. However, it is probably wise to give most children a very simple, carefully told, unemotionalized account

quite early, at least by the time they start school. This avoids the shock they may receive when they hear that " the Jews killed Jesus," or other remarks.

A matter-of-fact account is best. The parents should be prepared to answer questions and to give an interpretation, if necessary, but only so far as seems necessary. Do we want to fix a hatred of the " wicked people " who killed Jesus; or do we want our children to see that fear, selfishness, ignorance, and sin are to blame? If we want our children to hate sin but not sinners, here is one place to start. Jesus forgave those who betrayed him and asked God to forgive them. Let us center on the courage of Jesus and the power and love of God, not on the horror and the cruelty of men.

As for the Resurrection story, we want our children to have the good news that Christ lives. It is not so important that children try to understand our adult theological problems; it is important that they learn the victory of life over death, of good over evil. This should stand out above the picture of human wickedness and of the agony on the cross. There are groups today who in their teaching of little children concentrate upon the sacrifice of Jesus for their sins, upon the necessity for accepting him to save them from everlasting punishment. There is a good deal of emphasis on " being washed in the blood " and other familiar concepts. We do not ridicule this approach. We simply ask parents to read the Gospels again and to read them through entirely. Present Him whose picture you find there in his full stature, the many-sided, well-bal-

anced Son of Man, who came that " they may have life, and may have it abundantly."

If you are a parent whose love and character have made you able to see something of the true meaning of parenthood, and if you find Jesus a daily companion, you will be able to make him real for your children.

Chapter 5

Lamp of Our Feet

WHAT DO WE believe about the Bible? What do we know about how it came to be? What does it mean and how does it really count in our own lives?

We can search for these answers with our children. We need not be Bible " experts " before we can begin to help them. But if we do not feel the need to answer these questions for ourselves, we shall be able to do very little for our children.

One may hazard the statement that many parents have an uneasy feeling that their children ought to be learning about the Bible. This is indicated by their frequent demands that the Sunday School " teach the Bible." But these same parents cannot make a very satisfactory showing as to their own knowledge of the Bible and its place in their daily lives. Often they are not taking the trouble to find the answers to the questions with which we began this chapter.

Dr. Lewis J. Sherrill has said, " The Bible is meant to reach children first through the thinking and the living of their parents long before children can understand the relatively mature speech in which the Bible is written." If the Bible is our Book, we can give it to our children.

Parents should attend a good class for real Bible study. If such is not available, help to get one started. Read a few of the many excellent books which are

available, some of which are suggested at the end of this book. And study your own Bible. The Bible will stand any amount of questioning and search. It always comes out on top in a tussle with an honest mind. It cannot reveal itself with the covers closed!

Making the Bible Live Of course we want our children to " get the Bible." But what do we want them to get? Dates and events? Facts about the Bible? Mere skill in finding verses?

The most vital and significant thing in the Bible is religion. Who has not known persons who " knew " a good deal of Bible and had precious little of the spirit of Christianity? The Bible is important as history, though its aim is not to record history. It is important as literature. It is a great storehouse of human wisdom and experience. But it is pre-eminently a book of religion. And religion means life. Religion cannot remain in a book. It must step forth into life. The Bible has to be " translated " anew for every person and become revelation for each one, as God opens up each person's heart and mind through growth and experience.

If the Bible has helped parents to know and understand God, if they have found a living faith based on the Word of God, they can take their children to the Bible and help them to see for themselves the many ways in which people have discovered God and in which he has revealed himself to his people, including themselves.

Children will appreciate the Bible if it is associated

with many happy hours of companionship in storytelling and study with their parents. They will respect it because they see that their parents respect it, use it, and get strength and comfort from it. They will learn to love it because they have been helped to find in it the answers to their questions about the meaning of life.

Letting the Bible Speak for Itself Much of the finest teaching that is in the Bible is set forth in simple story and precept which are so true to human experience that they need no elaborate explanations. Must we not admit that it is not knowledge *about* the Bible, or historical criticism, or complex surveys, that we need most, but rather persistent, unclouded everyday exposure to its light and truth? As the Book of life, the Bible has molded character and shaped the destinies of men through generations — not by means of books of interpretation, but by its own pages.

This is not to discredit scholarship. Much that has been discovered about the Bible, even in recent years, will help us to understand it. But there is no substitute for firsthand knowledge. The Bible is thought of as an ancient Book, largely out of date, only by those who have never given it a chance to speak to their hearts and minds. We often do the Bible great violence. We make its stories strange and faraway, stories of another land and an ancient people. We do not seek to find the thread of living human experience that links us with the people in its pages as though they were contemporary. We wrench its verses from their

context to make them proof texts for every conceivable occasion. We try to make history of its folk tales. We try to make science of its poetry. We try to make fact of its beautiful allegories by which ancient teachers sought to convey the truth.

But the Bible stands the test because it is truth. Truth is more than fact. Things are not true because they are in the Bible; they are in the Bible because they are true. The Bible does not need to be protected or defended. It must and it can stand the test of experience. And that is the test which it demands!

A college boy whose sensitiveness and emotional unbalance, along with the eager searching of a brilliant mind, has brought him to confusion and uncertainty, cried out in bitter protest that the Bible was not what he had been led to believe. The narrow and pious view that had been given him in childhood would not stand the test of wider knowledge and experience. His teacher pointed out that he was in reality revolting against the whole narrow concept of life which his home had given him, and was making his religion, and particularly the Bible, the immediate object of his attack. He was reminded that the disturbance that caused him to question the Bible was not the fault of the Bible but of the wrong views he had been given.

" Simply forget that you have been told how you must feel toward the Bible, or what you must believe about it," said the teacher. " Go to the Bible and read it, as you would any literature, to find out the answer to your questions. Let it speak to your heart as well

as to your mind. You do not have to believe anything about the Bible. But you will."

That college boy knew very little of the Bible. He only knew that he had been taught that he must believe every word of it literally. He had often had it quoted to prove him wrong or to threaten him with dire punishment. He had little memory of happy hours with it. He had no experience of it as a source of joy and comfort to his parents or to himself.

Here was a boy who loved literature. He spent long hours with the poets, where his own poetic nature and imaginative mind were unhampered in a search for beauty, truth, and meaning. How he would have loved the psalms, had he been given the right conception of them! Parents with a wrong idea of the Bible and narrow, negative religious faith had practically closed to their son the greatest of all books.

Helping Children to Understand Memorizing Scripture verses or hymns is not always the same as understanding what the words mean. We all smile at the child who had been taught the hymn containing the words, " The consecrated cross I'll bear."

But he had learned the words before he could read and he thought the hymn said something about a " cross-eyed bear."

On the other hand, if children understand, partly at least, what they memorize, the results are quite different. There is good point to the story of the Sunday School class that had tried to learn the verse, " It is I; be not afraid." The following Sunday not one child

could recall the verse except a little colored boy, who rendered it thus: " Don't be scared; 't ain't nobody but me." This youngster had translated the text into his own language, and probably in terms of his own experience, and he remembered.

This leads us to emphasize what would seem to be a sound principle: We do not learn Scripture only to carry it tucked away in memory so that it may mean something to us when we get older. Of course any Scripture worth learning at all will grow in meaning as we grow in experience and comprehension. But it must mean something now in order to be more than mere repetition of words.

Relating the Bible to Everyday Living The logic which runs, " Children should have the Bible when they are young so that they will have it all ready waiting for them when they grow up," does not run far enough. The more complete statement would be, " Children should learn the Bible as children, when they are young, and keep on learning it for each stage of their development."

Some folks seem to think that you can stuff the child's mind with enough Bible to last him all his life, and that if you do not do this when he is a child, he will never read the Bible later on. That depends. If the Bible is taught interestingly and meaningfully early in life, there is more than an even chance that it will continue to be interesting later in life. But if taught wrongly early in life, the Bible may become a neglected, if not a despised, book later on.

Our whole purpose in teaching the Bible to children should be to teach children the Bible. We can risk what they will do with it in youth and adulthood if we play fair with them in childhood. Let's quit worrying about " storing " the child mind with the Bible, and put our effort on getting the Bible into his experience. Then nothing can take it away from him.

Parents must seek to give meaning to the Scriptures through making their own lives an interpretation, and through seeking to relate the Scripture to the daily experience of their children. Of what use is it to tell our children that the Bible is a Book of truth if we do not turn to it for guidance? Of what value is it to tell them that it shows us what God wants us to do, if we ourselves do not use it to give us that knowledge?

While we should not read too much of our adult feelings or interpretations into Bible stories for our children, we should not give the impression that these stories are just " children's stories " — for them, but not for us. Children look forward to being like adults, with adult privileges. For example, it is difficult to get some children to see why they should go to bed at an early hour while older people can stay up as long as they wish. Later they outgrow this restriction on their free choice. We do not want them to outgrow their religious interests and practices in like manner, simply because these have been identified only with childhood.

Ideas and knowledge must change and grow. But attitudes and feelings are very early becoming permanently a part of life. It is important therefore not to

identify religion only with the desires, the problems, and the limitations of childhood. Children are growing persons, and the adult is already present in the child. Religion must be adapted to the needs of children, but it need not be childish.

Grading Scripture for Children A good deal of thought has gone into selecting and grading Bible material for children. Naturally there is difference of opinion among leaders about this selecting and grading, because the understanding and receptibility of children vary widely, and the skill and judgment of parents and teachers also differ. Hence, mere grading of the material is not an infallible guide. With many Bible stories the selection of detail, the points of emphasis, the manner of telling and of illustrating make all the difference between their proper use with three-year-olds and with ten-year-olds.

Take, for example, the story of Samuel. From a delightful little story for tiny tots of a little boy whose mother let him help in the Church and who listened to God, this story can grow with the years into the portrait of an ancient man of God whose righteousness and strength helped to mold a nation.

Principles for Selecting Bible Stories There are some principles for the selection of Bible material for use with children that may prove helpful. Application of these principles depends on the good judgment of the teacher or parent. They take into account other factors than the age of the child, such as emotional

qualities, imagination, and ability to grasp abstract ideas. No one principle or combination of principles is conclusive.

First, is there an interest, or can a normal interest be created? The use of a Bible story or passage need not wait for a child's interest; interest may be created. But a story or lesson so far outside the child's needs or interest as to have to be forced upon him can have little value.

Secondly, does the story have any real present meaning? Does it have any meaning now which can serve as a steppingstone to larger meaning later on? Does it serve the purpose of forming impressions and attitudes which shall be a foundation for a growing appreciation and understanding? This does not pertain only to "rational" meaning, that is, appeal to reason and complete understanding with the mind. It pertains also to "feeling" meaning, that is, the emotional attitudes and satisfactions that come through the senses. For instance, parents may read aloud some of the great psalms, and other passages, which because of their literary quality rank with great music in effect, and give a sense of well-being and trust. Because this will be reflected perhaps in the voice and manner of the reader, the reading will have a meaning to children far beyond the range of their present intellectual grasp.

Thirdly, what sort of permanent impression is the story likely to make? Here again not only selection but handling is involved. One child remembered Jesus as "a man full of nails," from the Crucifixion story.

Another had from the story of the Flood a nightmarish picture of mothers and children drowning, with God looking on in anger. Another said that God once made the people of Israel go and chop off the heads of some people he didn't like. It is unfortunate when such are the permanent impressions and the dominant ones. We must add that in the cases cited the fault was probably in very bad use of the stories, though such impressions may occur when children are too young to grasp the larger meaning, but not too young to get vivid single impressions. The unskilled storyteller may overemphasize and dramatize the least important details, as has been illustrated earlier in this book.

Finally, does the story tend to develop appreciation? Does it add legitimately to the child's wholesome sense of wonder? Does it add in any way to a sense of beauty and holiness? Does it add to a sense of meaning and security, or does it promote fear and dread? Does it help to develop appreciation of the Bible as a source of interesting and helpful things to enjoy and think about? Does it help to bind child and parent in a satisfying common experience?

One of the Boards of Christian Education uses the following principles in selecting Bible materials for use in its curriculum:

"(1) Is this Scripture within the comprehension of the learner as it stands or as it may be retold or interpreted? (2) Will it make a definite contribution to his knowledge of the content of the Bible? (3) Will its omission result in ignorance of a part of Scripture with which he should become familiar? (4) Will it

help him to understand the revelation of God and his purpose for us and for the world? (5) Will it contribute to his mental, moral, and spiritual growth? (6) Does it teach the lesson intended without reading into it a meaning that is not there? (7) Is it in harmony with the general trend of the revelation found in the Scriptures? Can it be used without giving false ideas? (8) Can it be related to the learner's experience?

"Memory Scripture should be selected on the principles: (1) that it is related to the lesson or unit of lessons which is being used at the time; (2) that its own beauty makes it worth memorizing; (3) that it is understandable by the learner; (4) that it has some present value for the learner; and (5) that it summarizes truth or provides for organizing it in the mind of the learner."

Getting Perspective Perhaps one of the most common experiences of persons with regard to the Bible is the fragmentary, hodgepodge knowledge they have of it, and the jumbled impressions. This may be due to hit-and-miss [Sunday School] telling of unrelated Bible stories for which the setting and relation to the whole are not later supplied. It may be due to a moralistic use of the Bible as a book of proof texts to suit any and all occasions. Many adults who thought they knew something of the Bible, but who had a superficial and often largely false total impression of it, have been amazed when they have made a fresh study from a historical point of view, or a study of whole

books. Putting some of their favorite verses into correct context and perspective has sometimes been a shock, but it generally engenders new enthusiasm.

We will seek for our children this total view. For example, they will at first have only incidents from the story of Moses, or of David, but over a few years we should seek to fill out the portrait until they see the whole life and work in full view. At first there will be only incidents from the life of Jesus, but ultimately there must be a total view — his life story as we have it, his mission and his message, and the marvelous " wholeness " of the Christ in which God is at last so fully revealed.

Let us not think of the Old Testament as being preeminently the children's part of the Bible. We are likely to do this because the stories there are more in detail and seem easier to use, or because we associate these stories with our own childhood. Perhaps the practice of giving the Old Testament so largely to young children and then neglecting their religious training later, when they should have got equal knowledge of the New Testament, accounts for the fact that so many young people and adults have a sub-Christian or even unchristian idea of God.

While all Scripture is of value, it is not all equally valuable for all ages and all purposes. Certainly it would seem logical that a child's knowledge of the Gospels should receive early and persistent attention. Stories from the life of Jesus should be used over and over again, as single events, and woven into the life story. By the time the child is eight or ten, if not be-

fore, he should hear the entire Gospel, probably Mark, or a harmony Gospel compiled from the three Synoptic Gospels. We want our children to have the God that Jesus made known to the world.

Suggested Bible Readings The following suggested Bible readings will not suit everyone. This is a fairly broad selection, but it does not attempt to list many desirable verses and short passages that are valuable. Very little of the Bible is suited for direct reading with children under school age. It is better to tell the story in language suited to small children. Parents are advised to follow the recommended storybooks for selection and style, but not to rely entirely on reading. Make the story your own and *tell* it.

The arrangement in the sequence of the books of the Bible does not indicate that stories and passages should be used in this order. Such is not the case. Furthermore, in most of the longer selections, frequent omission of details will be necessary, the selecting of details depending somewhat on the child's development and ability to understand.

Besides a standard version of the Bible, parents will do well to have a modern translation, such as Moffatt, to aid in interpretation.

Genesis Chs. 1:1 to 2:3 The Story of Creation
Chs. 2:4 to 3:24 The Creation of Man and His Fall
Ch. 11:1–9 The Tower of Babel
Chs. 12:1–9; 13:1–13; 18:16–33 The Story of Abraham

Chs. 28:10 to 29:20; 35:9–15 The Story of Jacob

Chs. 37:2–36; 39:1–6; 19–23; 40 to 45 The Story of Joseph

Exodus Chs. 1:8 to 6:1 The Story of Moses (Some passages should be omitted.)

Chs. 12:29–36; 14:5–31 The Escape from Egypt

Chs. 19:1–6; 20:1–17 Moses Receives the Commandments

Joshua Chs. 23; 24 For Joshua's Address

Judges Chs. 1 to 16 For vivid narratives, especially ch. 7, The Story of Gideon, and ch. 16:4–31, The Story of Samson. The stories should be selected in the light of the children's age, and elements of cruelty avoided.

Ruth Entire book

I Samuel Chs. 1 to 3 Samuel's Call

Chs. 9 to 11 Saul Made King

Chs. 16 to 31 Early Years of David

II Samuel Chs. 4:4; 9:1–13 David and Mephibosheth

Chs. 15; 16:15 to 18:18 Absalom's Revolt

I Kings Chs. 1 to 4 The Story of Solomon

Chs. 17 to 19 Elijah

II Kings Chs. 2:1–22; 4:8 to 8:15 The Story of Elisha

Chs. 18 to 20 Hezekiah's Faith

Ezra Chs. 1; 3 to 6 Rebuilding the Temple

Nehemiah Chs. 1; 2; 4 to 6 Rebuilding the Wall of Jerusalem

Esther Entire book, as a story, especially chs. 1 to 7

Psalms Ps. 1; 15; 19; 23; 67; 90; 100; 117; 125; 130; and fragments of others, especially 119; 121; 136

Isaiah Much of Isaiah may be read for its sheer beauty, especially chs. 6; 9; 35; 40; 52; 53; 58; 60; 61.

Jeremiah Jeremiah's call (Jer., ch. 1) should be read, and several of his stories are delightful: Stories of the Potter, chs. 18; 19, The Story of Obedience, ch. 35. Also ch. 36, The Burning of His Writings

Hosea, Amos, Micah: Very little of the prophets may be read to children, but stories of Amos, Micah, and Hosea may be interestingly told.

Daniel Chs. 1 to 6

Jonah Entire book, as a story

The Gospels The older children should have a whole Gospel, probably Mark, or a harmony of the Synoptic Gospels, read straight through. In any case, we should try to give them a sense of the movement of events and the total view of Jesus' life as Gospel writers presented it. However, before that time many passages will have become familiar, such as:

The Birth of Jesus Luke 2:1–20; Matt., ch. 2
Jesus' Boyhood Luke 2:39–52
Jesus' Baptism Matt. 3:1–6, 13–17
The Temptation Matt. 4:1–11
The Sermon on the Mount Matt., chs. 5 to 7

At Work in Galilee Mark 1:14 to 6:13; 8:1–13, 27; 9:13

Stories Jesus Told Luke 10:25–37; chs. 15; 16:19–31; 18:9–14

Jesus Goes to Jerusalem Mark, chs. 10 to 13

The Last Week Mark, chs. 14 to 16

There are many beautiful passages in John, such as ch. 15:1–17, The Vine and the Branches, which should not be neglected.

The Acts Most of The Acts can be made interesting to older children, but the following passages are of special appeal:

Chs. 6; 7

Ch. 9:1–30

Ch. 17:13–34

Chs. 25; 26

Ch. 27

Philemon The little book of Philemon is delightful if one takes the trouble to learn its historical setting and meaning. It makes a lovely story to tell.

I Corinthians Ch. 13, should be learned early, as should also the Beatitudes and other passages. Most of the letters of Paul are of little interest or meaning to children, as are the remaining books of the New Testament.

Some Stories to Be Told to the Youngest Children

The First Christmas Luke 2:1–20

How the Wise Men Found Jesus Matt. 2:1–12

The Boy Jesus Goes on a Journey Luke 2:41–52

A Boy Who Returned Home   Luke 15:11–32
The Man Who Fell Among Thieves   Luke 10:30–37
The Boy Who Lived in the Temple   I Sam., chs. 1 to 3
The Coat of Many Colors   Gen., ch. 37
The Baby Who Was Found by the River   Ex. 2:1–10
A Shepherd Boy and a Bear   I Sam. 17:33–36
David and Three Brave Captains   I Chron. 11:15–19
The Boy Who Shared His Lunch   John 6:5–11

Bible Passages to Learn

The Ten Commandments   Ex. 20:1–17
The Shepherd Psalm   Ps. 23
The Beatitudes   Matt. 5:1–12
The Lord's Prayer   Matt. 6:9–13
The Golden Rule   Matt. 7:12
The First Psalm
The Love Chapter   I Cor., ch. 13

Chapter 6

The Meaning and Practice of Prayer

Said Dean Sperry, " Above all else, I should so order my relation with my child that in these matters where religion is at stake he should never have cause to distrust me."

The matter of this deep trust is vitally at stake in the prayer life of parents, for in prayer, expressed or unexpressed, we shall certainly reveal our sincerity or insincerity. The deep inner motives, the things we live by, are known to our children. Consciously or unconsciously, they sense our aspirations, our hopes, our fears. Our fundamental faith or our lack of faith cannot be hidden!

Prayer is a highly personal matter. But prayer is born, says Rufus Jones, out of our need for spiritual fellowship. As it is a means of fellowship with God, so it is also a means of fellowship among men. In the family the fellowship side of prayer is highly important. It brings the family together before the throne of grace. It magnifies the sense of all for each and each for all. It identifies the need of each with the desire of all, and the common need with the desire of each.

Prayer brings God into the family. That family of which God is a recognized member, and not just a visitor, is mightily enlarged. Sincere prayer and the conditions that make it possible tend to lift family life to

higher levels, to keep the sights high, to push the horizons back. It is difficult to be selfish and mean when in the intimate companionship of the family our thoughts and actions are brought in review before God.

" Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire " The first quality of prayer is sincerity. To profess desire for that which we do not really desire, or for what we think we ought to desire, is to delude ourselves, but not God.

True prayer must be the soul's sincere desire for that which is truly desirable. That is why sincere prayer helps to keep first things first. We may desire to have our own way, but the desirable way is God's way. " Not my will, but thine."

Prayer Is Talking Prayer is talking to God. Children can be led to talk to God quite naturally. This is why we should encourage them to talk to God in their own words as well as in the words of prayers they have learned. Memorized prayers are helpful to guide the child's thoughts. They help to give him a mode and a medium of expression. If used with understanding, they grow richer in association and meaning. But they can be mere rote. The words may be sounds with little meaning.

Use prepared prayers, but encourage the child to talk to God in his own way. He will be helped if his parents also talk naturally to God in conversational manner and in words which he can understand. Parents, however, should not pray in this manner only for the effect on the child. He will need to feel that

the words are their prayer also, expressing things common to him and to them. The child does not want us merely to put words into his mouth, or to say his prayer for him; let him rather say " our " prayer for " us."

Prayer Is Listening Prayer is not only talking to God; it is listening to God. In fact, the latter may be the more important. It is relatively easier to train children to talk to God, to express to him their desires and needs as well as their thanks and adoration, than to teach them how to listen.

It is hard to hear the " still small voice " in the din of life by which modern children are surrounded. They need to learn the use of silence. Some mothers have had great success in cultivating the use of the quiet time. They have begun when the children were very young to make the rest period a precious time of quiet conversation, soft music, appreciation of beauty, restful fellowship, which children love. Amazing have been the resources of poise, reflection, and spiritual insight some children have shown.

In some families a place of quiet has been set aside where one may go to recover his poise when tensions arise. Children as young as five or six have learned to retreat voluntarily for a quiet tussle with their own spirits when they have lost control. But the same sort of self-discipline is necessary for the parents if this is to be achieved.

This training in meditation and listening to God requires time which many parents do not feel they can

spare. It requires preparation of heart and mind. The story of Susannah Wesley's remarkable adventures with her many children, so beautifully told in *Susannah's Sanctuary,* by John and Mazelle Thomas, should prove a challenge to any mother.

Prayer Is Rejoicing " Religion is adoration," said the great mystic Von Hugel. Yes, adoration and thanksgiving. Prayer must not be too much associated in the minds of children with the overserious and with problem-solving. The right sort of prayer experience should aid in a happy, appreciative approach to life. If God shares our highest moments of joy and expectancy, he will seem more real in our moments of deepest need.

That is why we should often direct children's thoughts to God in praise and thanksgiving at times of greatest joy and happiness. We hear of parents' telling a child to ask God to forgive him and help him to be a good boy when he has misbehaved, or to turn to God for help when things go badly and he is hurt or disappointed. Less often do we hear them suggesting when the child is bursting with joy and exaltation at some triumph that he thank God for his goodness. God must be the Companion of all our ways, no stranger to any experience, or to any time or place.

Form and Content We have already suggested that prayer should be both formal and informal. We need to avoid rote prayers, repeated over and over endlessly — " vain repetitions." As fast as the child is able,

he may be led to learn several prayers of different form and content. Thus his praying is less likely to be mere ritual, and his thought and expression will be enriched.

The content of prayer is highly important. The prayers of parents will help to fix ideas about God in the child's mind. What sort of God do you pray to? Do your prayers reveal a broad, rich, many-sided experience of God, or do your prayers, because they have little variety and little thought, express only a limited, one-sided concept of God? This is important. Your prayers are revealing your God to your children.

Similarly, the child's prayers should come to have breadth and richness as he grows in experience and as life becomes more complex.

The use of printed prayers in good literary style and with the stately language of religion is to be encouraged. The child should start with the simplest words and ideas as, for instance, he does in learning to read, but just as we would not keep his reading forever confined to nursery rhymes, even though they may grow in meaning and have many happy associations, so we shall not want his prayers to be forever the limited prayers of babyhood.

Using the forms and words of printed prayers, either read or memorized, has of course the risk of rote saying. But it need not be so. One who would learn to write poetry must steep himself in the masters. He will learn form and style. But if he would write his own poetry, he must learn to speak from his heart.

The Steps in Prayer A Chinese student put the steps in prayer thus:

1. Stillness.
2. Reverence.
3. Humility.
4. Faith.
5. Obedience.
6. Love.

It would seem that there might be not only the "steps" of prayer, but the aims or objectives of prayer life. It is well to keep these things in mind as we try to help our children to develop the attitude and habit of prayer.

Prayer aims, not at changing God, but at changing ourselves. We must change our relation to God in order that his relation to us may be what he desires. One function of prayer is to revalue and transform the whole of life, including work and play, the physical and the mental.

God is our Refuge and Source of renewal, and prayer is our ascent to him. "The praying man," says Dr. Buttrick, "must believe that man is free, that God is near and good."

When Shall We Pray? When shall we pray? The question has already been answered, at least by implication. "Pray without ceasing." But there should be times for prayer. One answer for busy, highly organized families might be to have no stated hour, but to see that prayer gets into the family schedule frequently. Spontaneity is of great value in religious nur-

ture. Many family experiences or incidents which involve parent and child in close personal contact may be excellent occasions for prayer. This problem will receive more attention in a later chapter.

Whenever the time, it is important in the family worship, or in the bedtime period of conversation and prayer, to relate it to the total experience of the day. We must strive thus to keep prayer from being isolated from the total experience and God only partially related to life. How many children have been conditioned to think of God as caring for them while they sleep and not to think of his care in every waking moment too!

When Is Prayer Answered? What about answer to prayer? Children will need help at this point. For instance, they should never be encouraged to pray only for things, as if God would hand them out or they could be secured without human effort. They should pray that God will give them strength to act, not that God will act for them. Children must begin very early to realize that God has to think of the greater good. It was a long step in my thinking when as a small boy I began to see that God could not very well send rain on our cornfield where rain was needed and at the same time keep dry the neighbor's newly bunched alfalfa across the road.

The rain that spoils one person's picnic day may save another's crop, or water the thirsty birds and animals. We may point out to the children that the water that comes from our well deep down in the ground,

or from the reservoir, fell on the earth as rain many years ago and perhaps many miles away. God has to plan for everybody, and he works both at long and at short range. Some of his plans we can know and understand, but not all.

The manner of praying begins to shape the child's attitudes. For instance, he should not pray, " Dear God, please don't let the rain spoil our picnic tomorrow," but, " Dear God, we thank thee for the rain which makes things grow and cools and cleans the air." Here is an important difference.

There is a delightful story of the small son of a poor mother. He prayed often before Christmas for a certain gift. His mother was greatly worried as to what might happen to his faith when she was not able to provide the gift. Christmas came and the gift was not provided. The mother said, " I'm sorry that God did not answer your prayer." " Oh, he answered all right," said the boy. " He said, ' No.' " That boy had learned something of the meaning of prayer. God may say, " No."

Children trained to a naïve idea of how God answers prayer are ill-prepared for shock or disaster. It takes them a long time to learn the import of Jesus' words, " He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good." We must continually undergird the prayer life with knowledge of the orderly way in which God works in his world. No wonder so many children forsake prayer when they begin to find out " how things really work "! Prayer and discovery must go hand in hand. Prayer must keep step with discovery.

In addition to a knowledge of God's orderly work in his world, we can help children to develop an appreciation of how God works through persons. He can't do our task for us. He wants us to grow strong that we may help him to build his world. Prayer can be related to life. Let no occasion be lost to carry prayer into action. In prayer we are helping our children to express the deeper motives by which they live and test them against a growing appreciation of the justice and love and majesty of God.

Illustrative Prayers The prayers that follow are not intended for repeated use or for memorizing, though some of them may well be so used. Rather, they are intended for illustrations. Children should be encouraged and guided in making their own prayers. Parents need to have in mind that prayer should be meaningful, and therefore in language understandable to the child at his present age and experience. At the same time children should be getting accustomed to the more stately language of formal prayer. Both formal and informal prayers should be used.

The prayers that follow are not of the more formal or liturgical type, for such can be readily found in *The Book of Common Worship,* Revised, and in devotional material. Rather, these attempt for the most part to express everyday needs and thoughts in language meaningful to children. In most cases the thee's and thou's have been retained, though some parents will no doubt prefer the more intimate modern "you."

For Little Children

We thank thee, our dear Father,
For watchful care all night,
And now we thank thee once again
For lovely morning light.

So many things have gone to rest.
The world seems sleeping too.
And now, O God, I'm off to sleep;
Keep me the whole night through.

O God, we are so glad you give
To all of us the chance to live;
Bless everybody, everywhere,
And keep us all within thy care.

Table Grace

We thank thee, God, for milk and bread
And all our daily food;
These gifts remind us day by day,
Our Father, thou art good.

We thank thee, Father, for this food
To keep us well and strong;
And may we ever mindful be,
Our lives to thee belong.

Be present at our table, Lord;
Be here and everywhere adored;
Thy children bless, and grant that we
May eat and drink to honor thee. Amen.

— *Verkuyl (Adapted)*.

At this table, Lord, we ask
  That thou wilt be our guest.
We thank our Father for this food,
  And may we all be blest.

For Older Children

O God, may we ever seek what is true, see what is beautiful, love what is pure, and follow what is right, for the sake of Him who is truth and loveliness, purity and righteousness, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

— *From Prayers for Junior Worship*.

Holy God, who madest me
And all things else to worship thee;
Keep me fit in mind and heart,
Body and soul to take my part.
Fit to stand, and fit to run,
Fit for sorrow, fit for fun,
Fit for work, and fit for play,
Fit to face life day by day.
Holy God, who madest me,
Make me fit to worship thee. Amen.

— *From Orders of Service, Children's*.

Dear Father, I thank thee for all the wonderful things thou hast made. Thou hast made me and dost care for me, and for that I am happy. I thank thee for my home and my parents. Help me, O God, to be worthy of their love and of thine, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Another day has gone and I am ready for the night. Father, forgive me for all my failures to be my best today. Keep me safe through the night, and may I be able tomorrow to live more as thou wouldst have me live. Amen.

O God, we praise thee for thy goodness and for thy continued care for this world that thou hast made. Help us to work with thee in thy world to make it kinder and happier and to remove suffering and sorrow. Amen.

God, our Father, I need thy help always in order to do thy will. When I am tempted to do something wrong, or when I am selfish or lose my temper, help me to remember that thou art always near. When I remember that thou art good and loving, and when I remember Jesus, thy Son, I am able to try harder to be like him. Amen.

O God, Father of all men everywhere, we are sorry that there is not more love and kindness everywhere in thy world. Please help us to do more to make a world in which there will be fair play and mercy and love. Amen.

O Jesus, Friend of all who are in trouble, I know that you understand how badly I feel inside when things seem to go wrong. Please help me to be brave and to understand, to forget myself, and to forgive. Help me to remember the good and to overcome disappointment. Help me to think new thoughts and make everything seem right again. Amen.

In Time of Sorrow

O God, our Father, thou knowest our trouble, and we know that thou art near to comfort and help. We are glad that thou canst know our inner thoughts and understand how we feel. We thank thee for the strength to bear our sorrow and for the knowledge that thou wilt never forsake us. Amen.

For Our Work

Heavenly Father, we pray for a blessing on our daily work. Help us to do well and honorably the work thou hast given us to do. Teach us patience and courage in difficulty. May we work with joy, in helpful companionship with others, and in fellowship with our Master, Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Morning Prayer

We thank thee for sleep in the long, quiet night,
For returning light of the brave new day;
For thy help to live out this day for the right,
Our Father in heaven, we earnestly pray. Amen.

A Morning Prayer

O God, we thank thee for the sweet refreshment of sleep and for the glory of a new day. As we face this day, help us to do our best that we shall not need to be ashamed when the day is done. And may we live each day to the glory of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
  Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
  And do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
  Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
  To do and to endure.

— *E. Hatch.*

Thank God for Order

We thank thee, God our Father, that thou dost reveal thyself in so many ways. We thank thee that thou hast made a wonderful world of order and law, and that men can learn thy laws and work with thee in thy creation. Teach us some fresh lesson every day and write thy laws on our inmost minds. Help us to obey thy will. Amen.

For the Presence of God

God be in my head, and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking.

— *Sarum Primer.*

Prayers for Family Use

For Our Home

O God, we thank thee for our home and for the love that makes all of us do our part to make home a happy place. Help us to play and to work and to share what we have so that each one can be his best self. We want to help ourselves and to help each other to do thy will and we ask thee to help us all. Amen.

For Friends and Neighbors

Our Father, we pray especially for our friends and neighbors. Please help us, O God, to be loyal friends and kind neighbors. We would like to follow the example of Jesus who loved and helped all kinds of people because all are thy children. We know we need to remember thee in order to have love in our hearts and we ask thy help, in Jesus' name. Amen.

For the Things of Life

Our God, we give thanks today for all the many persons in the world who help to give us the things

we have. We are grateful to the farmers who grow our food and to all the men and women who work to bring it to us, the milkman, the grocer, and all the rest. We thank thee for the men who run the trains and drive the trucks, and for the people who make our clothes. Help us, our Father, to see how thou canst use all the people to work in thy world, and help us to do our share. Amen.

For God's Beautiful World

O God, our Father, we thank thee for thy beautiful world which thou hast given to all men. Help us to see thee at work in the world. We love the growing things, the rain and the storms, the sunsets, and the songs of birds. Help us to appreciate thy world and do our part to keep it lovely. Amen.

For Forgiveness

Our Father, we ask thee to forgive us for all our failures. We are sorry for bad thoughts and harsh words. Help us to remember that thou art always near, so that we shall be helped to do our best. And for the example of Jesus, who taught men how to live, we praise thy name. Amen.

Chapter 7

Religious Practice in the Home

" And an old priest said,
Speak to us of Religion,"
And he said,
" Have I spoken this day of aught else?
Is not religion all deeds and all reflection,
And that which is neither deed nor reflection,
But a wonder and a surprise ever springing in the soul,
Even while the hands hew the stone or tend the loom? "

— *Kahlil Gibran.*

JUST what can we do about it? " This question may persist, even though many suggestions of method have been dealt with directly or indirectly in preceding chapters. Perhaps if this book is to be of greatest use to that group of parents who have been doing little to fulfill their obligations for the religious nurture of their children, but who would like to begin, we had better attempt to be even more specific.

How Shall We Begin? We must make a beginning. The manner of this beginning is important. Religious living is a continuous process. The development of Christian knowledge and Christian attitudes is a day-

by-day affair. We cannot decide suddenly that we must do something about religion and announce that tomorrow we will begin having grace at table and prayers at bedtime. The religious expression and direct teaching ought not to be " dragged in "; they ought to arise naturally out of family activity and association.

First of all, parents, we shall need to prepare ourselves. Study and thought and prayer will be necessary in order that we ourselves may have the consistent point of view which has been stressed in preceding chapters. We must see clearly what it is we are trying to accomplish. Remember, this is not something we can do for our children apart from how it affects us. We are in it too!

Religious thought and expression cannot be resurrected from our hazy memories of our childhood and passed on to our children. If we are not adapting to their understanding religious ideas and practices that mean something to us here and now, we are simply passing on a dead tradition.

Therefore we must prepare. Something that is so tremendously vital is worth the cost. We will study to get better foundations. We will face the fact that religious observance in the home may mean some changes in our own pattern of living. We will face the fact that there will be demands on time and energy. We must dedicate ourselves to a long-time effort, not to a resolution that will be given up in a few months because it is too difficult to keep.

If the children are small, we can begin to talk to

them about God when they go to bed and guide them in simple prayers. We can begin to use Bible stories selected and written for little children. We can begin to spend time with them in observing natural beauty and simple phenomena, and associating these things with God as Creator. We can begin to try to tell them what God means to us, and to give simple, natural indications of how our Christian faith motivates our own lives.

All questions that are sincere requests for information or explanation should be met to the best of our ability, but especially is this true of questions having religious significance. Some questions can never be answered fully. If it is a matter of information and the parent does not know, he should attempt to find out. When possible, children should join in the quest.

For such questions as those concerning God — Who is he? Where is he? Can he do everything? — often the best answer is a simple statement of what God means to us. This means that we have to have knowledge and experience of some sort. It does put upon us a tremendous responsibility. But to give a careless answer in terms that do not express real meaning for us is to be false to our trust and to the faith of our children. Sincerity is often more important than profundity. Make your own answers out of the depth of your own mind and heart.

The Family Interprets the Child's Total Experience

If children are in Sunday School, we can begin to take real interest in their courses, and in their home study.

We can begin to use in family conversation the things they learn at Church. Right here is indicated a most important family function for children of school age — the family is the chief integrating agency. In family conversation and practice, the teaching of Sunday School can be related to the experience of public school and family and community life.

The child's world is complex. He has a great task of assimilation and adjustment. The family " clearinghouse " is his point of reference. If, as parents, we have calm and mature judgment, a sense of values, and a larger perspective, and if we have the child's confidence, we can tie all together in a livable pattern and help to sort out the good from the " not good."

Prayers, songs, stories, and Bible verses learned at Sunday School can be used in home worship. One of the most valuable things parents can do is to help to put into practice during the week the ideas given to the children in Church. One great value of this practice is that parents begin to know what the Church School is doing for their children. They can supplement that instruction. They can correct false impressions. They will know whether the Church School teaching is in harmony with their own point of view. And it is to be hoped that they will become interested in improving the school.

Family Worship Thus far we have spoken of family conversation, bedtime prayers, grace at table, and of the less tangible and more difficult business of relating experience to teaching through play and work and

the routine of family living. Now we face the question of family worship in terms of a stated time.

It is difficult in many families to set aside a definite time for family worship. Diversity of activities makes it almost impossible to maintain a regular schedule. We have to recognize also that if family worship has not been a practice from the beginning, or from the time the first child could participate, it may be a problem of how to begin. If the children are old enough to participate in the discussion, there may be a family " pow-wow " on the question of setting aside and safeguarding the time.

If the family have breakfast together, there may be a brief period just before breakfast or at the close of breakfast. This gives a good start for the day. But in many families it is all but impossible to gather the family in the morning.

The next best time is the evening meal. A few minutes can be spent around the table, with a story, or a Scripture reading, a hymn, a prayer, perhaps more or less consciously related to the conversation about persons and events or family matters, which need to be discussed in such an atmosphere. These occasions should have spontaneity and avoid becoming monotonous. They will need newness and expectancy. This will take thought and some planning. Someone will need to be on the lookout for new ideas and all should be encouraged to take part.

At Bedtime The bedtime period has been a rich experience for countless children, when daddy or

mother, or perhaps both, tucked them in, shared a few moments of fellowship, and heard the good-night prayers. This precious privilege and rich opportunity is to be jealously guarded. If it is the exclusive religious observance, it has the danger of making God a sort of bedtime guardian for small children. If it is for the child only, and seems to bear no relation to other religious practice in the parent's life, it may seem to the child a part of his childhood, to be outgrown along with many childhood practices.

Special Occasions If we cannot establish a regular time for family worship daily or at certain times during the week, we can make use of certain high occasions. We have already stressed the use of all chance occasions that arise naturally. Mother is in the garden and Janet wants to know what makes the flowers grow, or how a bird knows how to build a nest. Johnny comes home from school with a glowing account of how the children made fun of a poor boy because his pants had patches. So day by day and every day the opportunities arise for Christian teaching.

One family has a " family night," which they try to keep clear of distractions. There is an air of expectancy, perhaps something special for supper, often some surprise. Then there is a period of fun. Children contribute their part. Baby says the nursery rhymes he knows, Mary, aged six, sings her little song. Daddy, perhaps, tells a Bible story or reads again the leaflet or booklet from the Sunday School. Then there is a little prayer of thanksgiving and the children are off

to bed. Some families try to keep Sunday evening clear for such family fellowship and worship.

Some families are making effective use of all outings for building religious attitudes and for teaching. A picnic by the lake or in the woods, or a hike across the fields, ends in a period of praise. There is observation of the wonders of nature to see God's handiwork. Perhaps there is a period of meditation at the sunset, or of listening to God speak through the wind in the trees or the ripple of the water. Then there may be a religious poem, or Scripture chosen for the out-of-doors. Best of all are the hymns suitable for the out-of-doors which all have learned and come to love.

Making the Most of Vacations Families who have summer vacations, and whose lives during the other months of the year give insufficient opportunity for companionship and religious teaching, have found vacation a wonderfully creative time for sustained religious living. Away from the routine and strain of busy lives they have been able to dig deep. The contribution to child life of this closer companionship and more thoughtful teaching has been far-reaching in its effect.

The Use of Hymns Hymn-singing is too much neglected in Christian homes today. Radios and secular music have replaced one of the richest sources of spiritual help and religious teaching. Said a friend: " My father was inarticulate in matters of religion. He lived his faith, but he seldom spoke of it. But one thing he did do that has left its deep mark on my life — he

sang into my very soul some of the great old hymns. It was his practice to rock us to sleep at night, and from those precious hours come back to us now the great assurances that were sung."

Let us sing our faith to our children and teach them to sing. Every child ought to know and sing hymns, hymns suited to his understanding and some of the ageless hymns of the Church which he cannot yet fully understand. There are simple songs for the preschool youngsters. Parents will do well to secure copies of *When the Little Child Wants to Sing*, *Primary Music and Worship*, and *Hymns for Junior Worship*.

Following are some of the hymns that should be known by every child by the time he is twelve years old:

"Fairest Lord Jesus"
"This Is My Father's World"
"Rise Up, O Men of God"
"Faith of Our Fathers"
"For the Beauty of the Earth"
"I Love to Tell the Story"
"Our God, Our Help in Ages Past"
"Lord of All Being, Throned Afar"
"O Worship the King, All Glorious Above"
"Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart"
"The Church's One Foundation"
"Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"
"Come, Thou Almighty King"
"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"
"Lead On, O King Eternal"
"We Plow the Fields"

The Family Place of Prayer We have already in an earlier connection mentioned a quiet time, and practice in the use of silence and meditation. If it is at all possible, there should be set aside in the house a sort of sacred spot or dedicated place — a family altar, if you please. This is not a " shrine "; it is simply a place that may become very special as it gathers about it the memories of quiet moments and high thoughts.

The place may be established unceremoniously through common consent, or it may be formally set aside with a consecration service. It may be marked by a religious picture or by the presence of the Bible and devotional literature. It may have a cross and other symbols. There ought to be no pious mystery about it; no impression that God is more here than elsewhere. But here it is easier to feel the presence of God, for it helps to shut the world out. It is a reminder. Its atmosphere helps our thoughts and chastens our experience.

An eight-year-old child who was having a rich experience of worship in Sunday School, where a lovely worship center was much appreciated by the children, made her own little altar in her room, much to her mother's surprise. On a little table she placed her Bible and a candle, and above it she hung a copy of Hofmann's picture of Jesus as a boy. She said it did not let her " forget about God."

The Use of Pictures The wise selection of religious pictures for the home is to be highly commended. In this most parents ought to seek guidance. Some so-

called religious pictures fix in a child's mind religious ideas that are not desirable. It is well to select pictures suitable for small children and to change the pictures frequently as the children grow older. Fortunately, good quality religious prints are not very expensive. Some picture suggestions may be found at the end of this book.

It is well to use several different pictures of the same subject and point out that these represent what different artists have felt about the subject. This stimulates imagination and prevents a single impression from becoming fixed in the mind.

Christian Literature In this book there has been a strong emphasis on Biblical sources, since that is the point of greatest neglect today. But this does not mean that there is not much other religious literature of great spiritual value. There is a vast treasure house of stories with moral and religious meaning. Religious history is full of adventure and heroism. In a time when we desperately need to make Christianity a great challenge to the rising generation, we must not neglect this way of showing what our religion means in the lives of great Christians.

There are the great Christian heroes down through the centuries: Saint Francis, Luther, Wycliffe, Calvin, Knox, and many others. And the missionaries: Livingstone, Mary Slessor, Schweitzer — what a list! The tales of Christian heroism around the world today are as thrilling as " Buck Rogers " and " Superman " and far more profitable. We must see that our children

have access to these stories and that they hear them told.

Kagawa has rightly said that one of our greatest failures in Christian education is our failure adequately to introduce our children to the heroism and adventure of the Christian faith in action in the lives of great Christians around the world.

We ought to be on the alert to show our children the power of Christian faith in life today as exemplified by contemporary men and women. Every boy who is interested in airplanes has known and admired the great designer Sikorsky. Ought he not to know that this same Sikorsky has written a lovely book on the Lord's Prayer?

The stories of Christian missionaries standing by in China, of Christians in European concentration camps for conscience' sake, and of many Christians going here and there across boundary lines wherever there is suffering to help to heal the wounds of war might counteract some of the din of strife and hate in the world. There are many great though humble Christians in all walks of life. Our children ought to know about them.

Magazines come into our homes and the radio and movies act with great force in forming the opinions of our children. Negative control of these things is next to impossible and not very desirable. Far better is selection and intelligent use. Choose good radio programs which the family can enjoy together, and help by discussion and comment to make them more meaningful.

Some of the family radio programs are very wholesome. If there are children's programs which the children hear regularly, parents should follow them also, at least closely enough to help to interpret them and to counteract false impressions. Movies should be chosen with care, and there are some good motion pictures for the entire family. Thoughtful parents have found that they can help their children to develop discrimination and critical understanding which do much to overcome any overstimulation and false glamour in the pictures, as well as the sometimes misleading suggestions as to right and wrong.

Many believe that children under twelve would be better off if they saw only movies especially for children. Others feel that intelligent guidance by parents, as indicated above, is better than prohibition — that is, guidance rather than shielding. It is better to develop good taste and judgment than to place a false value on things by unreasoned prohibition.

The Use of Sunday The use of Sunday is a major problem for parents in modern times. It is not a problem for which there are easy solutions, yet it does seem that we complicate it unnecessarily. Given a positive, constructive point of view which can be followed with some degree of consistency, the average family can make Sunday a " holy day."

First, let us remind ourselves of Jesus' attitude: " The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." The negative phrasing of much of the Fourth Commandment, after the first strong phrase,

" Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy," has been the cause of some of our difficulties, no doubt. A few years ago, the writer stepped into a Church School department when the children were reciting the Ten Commandments. As they repeated, " In it thou shalt not do any work," et cetera, there suddenly came the question, " What is the meaning of that to children who are here because street-car conductors and motormen are working, and in whose homes even now cooks and maids are preparing the family dinner? " " Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." By all means. But the negative admonitions of an ancient day are not now sufficient. We must help children to use Sunday wisely and happily.

A high-school girl came to her pastor greatly distressed by a conflict with her father over horseback riding on Sunday. Her father considered it very wicked. " But," she said, " he goes for long drives in the car, and I can't see the difference." It was pointed out to her that her father had been taught as a boy that horseback riding on Sunday is wrong. He was not so taught concerning automobile-driving because there were no cars then. This failure to see the principle which is involved and to apply it consistently in differing circumstances is the source of much difficulty. Our children need the bases of judgment, not rules.

If you ask a group of children whose parents have any concern for Sunday how their families observe the day, you will get from some the sad statement, " We are not allowed to do so and so," or, " Our mothers and fathers think it is wrong to do this or that." From

others you will get joyous answers, " Oh, on Sunday we always do this or that! " One set of answers is negative; the other, positive. Here we have illustrated a principle. Christianity is not a negative religion. What makes the Sabbath holy? Not what we refrain from doing, but what we do.

What Is Sunday For? Sunday is a day of rest (not much meaning in that for the little child, perhaps). Sunday is a day of praise. (So should every day be.) Sunday is a day of family fellowship, or surcease from the pressures of life. It is a day of spiritual renewal. It is a day to break the humdrum life, to collect our forces, to get ready for a fresh start.

Sunday is a day of rejoicing; a day for friends and for music. It is a day for restoring the soul. Indeed, it is a very special day! How shall we make it so for our children? First of all, by making it such a day for ourselves, and then by associating them with us more closely than on any other day in its beauty, contentment, joy, and praise.

We want our children to learn how to use Sunday to the glory of God. To that purpose all which exalts life is acceptable to him. We want the habit of good and satisfying things to leave no room for that which stultifies and degrades life.

The intent of this book is against a " Sunday religion." But the Christian life demands a Sunday. Parents who fill Sunday with joyous living, with a time of worship, an intimate fellowship, and constructive ac-

tivity for active minds and bodies will have little difficulty in guiding their children.

What about Sunday entertainment? What about picnics and all-day Sunday outings? One cannot be dogmatic. Certainly there are some things that are inappropriate. There will be in most Christian families some things about which there will be little argument. " We simply do not do that," we say.

Many things are not necessarily wrong in themselves, but there is time for them during other days of the week. Sunday is too precious to be used carelessly. What we do is a matter of wise choice and propriety. It is a matter, not only of our own good, but of the good of others. If we who are Christian cannot choose the better way, how can we help others to choose?

In another chapter we shall speak of family and Church. May we say here that a good rule for Sunday is this: Make central a fine family experience of worship in Church School or Church or both; then do nothing else on Sunday that seems out of keeping with the praise and high resolve of that experience. Remember that the Christian seeks to make every day glorify God, but the right use of Sunday helps us to choose the right at all times.

How Complete Is Your Program? For those families who seek to develop a full-rounded program of Christian training in the home, we present here a list of definite things that may be done. It is a list to test

your vision of what may be done or to check the comprehensiveness of what you are now doing. Check your practice against this list. Add items at intervals, until you have all these essentials in your program.

1. Grace at meals.
2. Bible-reading and prayer.
3. Use of a devotional booklet, regularly or in certain seasons, such as the Lenten season.
4. A " quiet corner " or family altar.
5. Use of books, both definitely religious and indirectly of religious value. A good plan is to make this a budget matter and buy a new book frequently.
6. The use of religious pictures in the home.
7. Reading a denominational paper to keep in touch with the larger affairs of the Church and of the Christian world.
8. Reading a Christian family periodical.
9. Attention to the bulletin of your local Church so that the activities of the Church are a part of the family planning and conversation.
10. Attendance at Sunday School and Church.
11. Attention in the home to the Sunday School lesson materials, not only to help the children to learn, but to carry into daily living their Christian teachings.
12. Conscious effort in family fellowship and conversation to bring Christian principles to bear upon the concerns of life in home, school, work, and play.

Chapter 8

The Family and the Church

It is not our purpose here to discuss at length the nature and meaning of the Church. The word has many meanings. In this brief discussion we are thinking of the Church primarily in its function as a fellowship which nurtures, guides, and inspires the growing life.

Through its worship, its teaching, and its many other activities the Church as a fellowship of younger and older persons shares its beliefs and ideals. It is a dynamic social group. As a school it may teach religion as a subject, more or less effectively, but as a fellowship it has a " faith to be realized " through all the manifold influences of the common life. In a world of secularized environment it provides a fertile soil and a favorable climate for spiritual growth.

Arthur E. Morgan has pointed out that " unless supported by the surrounding community, the single family generally is too small a unit to maintain fine standards." If this is true for the ordinary virtues of decent people in our present culture, it is doubly true for the more exacting standards of Christian living. Outside the fellowship of some Church group we do not live in a Christian community in any real sense, but in a secular community, which tends to destroy Christian ideals, or to trim them down, rather than to support them.

Thus, we see why the family that would be Chris

tian is impelled to seek within the fellowship of the Church a communal support for its way of life. Most theories of education today recognize the power of the community as a teaching force. We think of community as that complex of human relationships of which one feels himself to be a vital part. It is the group, or interwoven set of groups, to which one belongs as a recognized participant in its affairs. From it he receives his chief motivation, his pleasures, his ideals and ideas, his patterns of thought and habit. No thoughtful parent will leave this matter of community, thought of in this sense, to circumstance or chance. The "natural" community, determined by mere location and undirected choices, is for many children not very good and for many unmistakably bad. Parents must select and help to make the community that shall be the dominating one for their children.

No parent, therefore, who is concerned about the environment in which his child is to grow up will neglect the fellowship of the Church as an essential partner of the home.

The Child's Real Community What makes up the community for your child? Family, school, gang, play groups, neighbors — we might name many elements. The basic factor is the family. It is the function of the family as the primary unit in the child's community to set him a good example, to support him with love and care, to help him to select the ideas and activities that are constructive, and to help him to evaluate the many influences that play upon him.

The family is a sort of " home base." The good family takes all the varied currents that play upon the child in a complex world and helps to give them wholeness and meaning. The family helps to make a pattern of living out of a jumble of influences. It gives direction and purpose. It stimulates and guides growth. It interprets and demonstrates. That is why it is so important for parents to share as fully as possible the life of their children.

Parents are being urged today to share in the life of the school through parent-teacher associations and other activities. They are drawn into the Scouting program, into camping, and into many other activities that affect their children. The reason for this greatly increased emphasis upon keeping parents fully informed concerning the activities that affect their children is the growing realization that it is the family which can best help the child to take all these influences and interests, sort them out, weave them together, and make out of them an orderly, satisfying plan of living.

The Church as Community In this function of giving life wholeness and unity the Church is a great ally of the family, ever holding up the central things of life and calling persons to higher loyalties. The family is a community within a community. The Church is also a community within a community. However, the Church is not just a geographical unit. Locally, it is a selected unit of society, bringing people together around certain beliefs and objectives, bound by common needs and hopes.

Thinking of the Church universally, we may say that it is the greatest community to which the child may be introduced. The family has the supreme privilege and also the duty to take the child into this greatest of all communities.

The Church is the "fellowship of the sons of God around the world." As a community it transcends all others. It cuts across all barriers of race, class, or condition of life. It reaches far back into history and looks forward into eternity. It has a divine commission and a God-given message. No one is entirely without friend, or refuge, or fellowship, who has found his place in the Christian Church.

As a community the Church has many faults. Locally, it may lack vision and leadership and be of little credit to the spirit of its Christ. But the Church is also a self-critical and self-correcting body. It is the one great institution that continually holds before itself an impossible ideal. It has continuity, universality, and great, unmeasured power.

To that community your child has a right to belong. It is his rightful heritage. But he cannot be "sent" into it. He must be "taken" into it. Can we not say that as the family ought to be a part of the Church, the Church ought to be a part of the family? They should not be communities that touch each other only at the fringes; they should envelop each other.

Through baptism and dedication parents bring their children into a covenant relationship to the Church, signifying "their membership in the household of faith." In their Church they have taken a vow

with regard to the spiritual welfare of their children. By implication at least, the Church has promised a relationship to such a family that will help them to fulfill their promises.

We can create in the Church a fellowship that supports, extends, exalts, and spiritualizes the fellowship of the family. The Church lifts the family together toward higher loyalties, which give meaning, greater permanence, and stability to family loyalties. And the family with its primary task of helping growing persons to find the abundant life is an ever-present challenge to the Church to keep its message fresh and clear, its method up-to-date.

The Church in Family Living The only effective way to extend the family community into the Church community is to make the Church a strong and constant factor in family life. That means that Church activities must have their rightful place in the family schedule. That means adequate attention to the place of the Church in family planning, family thinking, family giving. We are speaking here of the Church not only as an organization but as a fellowship, and as the body of Christ, guided by his Spirit.

It is as if the parents might say to their children: "We cannot always defend and protect you. Our home cannot always shelter you. We cannot always bear your burdens and share all your griefs. Our family may be disrupted by death or disaster, ill-health, or other circumstances. But we shall take you into a larger 'family' where you can throughout your life,

wherever you may go, find fellowship and comfort, forgiveness and love, and where you may join with others in the quest for abundant living."

Recently in a Church supposedly ministering to over 800 persons it was discovered that in 240 families only 77 were actively represented by both fathers and mothers, slightly more than that number by either one or the other parent. For most families only the children had a connection with one or more of the activities. In these cases the " communities " of family and Church are touching each other at the fringes.

Children in this situation lack the supporting family unity which they need. On the other hand, the Church is not getting support in its efforts to build the children into an enduring fellowship. These families are not taking full account of the function of the Church in helping the family in its quest for the good life.

Parents Are Teachers The attitude of parents is of supreme importance in bringing children into vital and lasting relationship to the Church. Whether they accept the role or not, parents are teachers. Indifference, neglect, criticism, and lack of appreciation carry their own lessons.

One mother made the following frank confession: She said that her small son began to be very critical of Sunday School and to protest against going. She and her husband were at first inclined to accept the boy's appraisal. But then she decided to find out the real reason for his attitude. After visiting the Sunday

School several times, she decided that there was no good reason why the boy could not be happy in his class and department.

She began to look deeper, and was discerning enough to find the cause and honest enough to confess it. This is what she said: "My husband and I believe in the Church and we generally attend services. But we are both inclined to speak critically and my husband is often a bit cynical. We awakened to the fact that our son was hearing at the Sunday dinner table all that we did not like about the sermon, or about the heat, or the lighting, or the choir, or the soloist, or Mrs. Jones's hat.

"Whereas in his earlier years we had been interested in his kindergarten adventures, his Sunday School stories and pictures, we had of late paid little attention to what he was doing. In spite of our fundamental loyalty to the Church, we were destroying our son's trust and interest. We corrected our behavior and we soon had no more difficulty."

The story could be duplicated over and over again, except for one fact — few parents discover the right cause as these parents did.

In countless ways we may defeat our hope of bringing our children to full and satisfying participation in the life of the Church: by infrequent attendance, by only casual knowledge of its purpose and program, by inadequate and grudging financial support, and by letting the pressures of life crowd it far down in the scale of our interests. In these ways, without meaning to, perhaps, we place a low valuation on the Church.

If the Church is not a matter of first concern to us, why should it be to our children?

If we are to bring our children into the life and fellowship of the Church, we must think of ourselves as responsible citizens of the Church " community." We will seek to contribute our share in its work and worship. We will give financial support to the best of our ability. We will think of ourselves as belonging, not only to a local congregation, but to the larger body of our denomination and to the Church universal. We will see responsibilities, therefore, which go beyond the local Church.

We will know that any institution made up of people will have human faults, but we will seek to see beyond all pettiness to fundamental truth and worth. We will think of the Church, not as a fellowship of " good " people who ought not to show any human frailties, but as a fellowship of imperfect growing persons who are in the process of " being saved."

We will not always ask, " What is the Church doing for me? " but, " What do I owe to the Church? " We will see that while the Church is an institution, it is also a spirit, an ideal, and a quest, and that it can be for each one of us more meaningful only as we ourselves make it so.

Togetherness Is Important Stress has been laid upon the necessity of parents and children participating together in the life of the Church. The modern practice of " departmentalizing " may be partly responsible for the division of family loyalties. Certainly there are

several mistaken ideas that hamper the present-day Church program. One of these mistakes is that the Sunday School is chiefly for children and that adults do not need to study. The business of living as Christians demands lifelong study and growth. The Church should be a school in Christian living for persons of all ages.

Another mistake is the use of grading and grouping in such a way that the child does not get a sense of belonging to and participating in the full life of the Church. Persons may have intense loyalties within the Church — to a department, a youth group, a Bible class, a women's society, a men's club — and still have very little loyalty to, and responsibility for, the larger entity which contains and transcends all these organizations.

Another fallacy is the belief that children cannot profitably worship with adults. They are often left out of the central worship and praise services of the Church. Not later than the junior age, children should learn to participate with their parents in the Church services, and services should be planned to make family worship possible.

Still another fallacy is that the Church can do the whole task of teaching religion. The religious nurture of children is a parental responsibility. The Church School was developed as an aid, not as a substitute. The very least that the parents must do is to give positive, appreciative support to the school, and the example of interested participation. They ought also to teach and to interpret their Christian faith in intel-

ligent co-operation with the pastor and the Church School teachers.

It must be admitted at once that a thoughtful Christian does not wish to give his children a " Church-centered " religion. He wants them to be spiritually minded persons whose religion permeates all of life. Nor can one contend that all local Churches are capable of giving children the best guidance in spiritual growth. The point of view we are presenting should by this time be clear. Religion must be inherent in the family life. If it is to be taken seriously, it must be a part of the child's life and thought day by day. But the family needs the Church, and the family has both the opportunity and the duty to try to make the Church what it ought to be — a true family of God in which children may find a true fellowship in meaningful study and activity.

The family needs the supporting fellowship of like-minded persons. The family needs the added sense of security that belonging to the Church supplies. The family needs the sharpened and ever-renewed sense of fellowship with Christ and of duty to God which study and service and worship in the Church are able to give.

Children need the example of an intelligent and sustained higher allegiance on the part of their parents. They profit greatly from the challenge of participation with parents and other adults in an enterprise which adults value and consider worthy of a central place in their lives. The Church is one of the few institutions that serve all ages.

The Church as a Family We have dealt at length with these principles of relationships and the question of attitudes because these are the fundamental issues. May we discuss briefly some practical issues which face parents who want the Church to have a large place in family life?

If we may take, for the moment, a somewhat limited view of the Church, but continue to think of it as a community and as a " family," we may draw certain comparisons. Like the family, the Church is made up of growing persons with differing personalities. These persons have both common needs and individual needs. They have some interests common to all and many differing interests. In the Church, as in the family, there must be sharing. The stronger must help the less favored. Each must be concerned for the good of all. All are responsible for the welfare of each. And so on.

Can we not say that most of the qualities that are required if one is to be a good member of a family are required for the fullest membership in the Church? Parents, therefore, must seek to do all in their power to make the Church what it ought to be for them and for their children, and for all others who are joined in the fellowship. It is this full adult participation that is the very foundation of child interest and loyalty.

From the time children enter the nursery class or kindergarten in the Church, parents should show an interest in their activities and make it obvious that they know and appreciate, and feel some responsi-

bility for, the experiences the children are having. It makes a great difference to children whether the Church seems to be just another institution to which their parents send them for reasons that may not be very clear to them, or whether it is " our " Church, for which father and mother very obviously have responsibility and concern.

As children grow older, they will wonder what the Church really means to their parents. They will be interested to know what their parents do in the Church and why they do it. Parents should seek to interpret the whole program, so that the child will begin to feel his relationship to an inclusive body, of which the several activities and groups are but convenient ways of meeting varied needs and interests. They should attempt to portray the Church at work in the community, the Church at work in the world, the historic Church across the sweep of the centuries. This cannot be safely left to the chance impressions of a Sunday School lesson unit, or a missionary project, or a youth discussion group. This is in large measure a parents' task.

Parents should not expect the Church, as something apart from themselves, to win their children to membership and loyalty. In one sense, they are the Church. It is their opportunity to have a child grow up in the Church as in the family and never feel that he has been outside its fellowship.

There should be frequent opportunities for parent and child fellowship in work and worship and recreation in the Church. It is a significant fact that in many

Churches today which are growing and influencing their people there is a family-centered program. By study groups for all ages, unified worship, family nights at church, children's and young people's choirs — by these and other methods they engage the interests of the whole family as a family. And these Churches are holding their young people. It is useless to stand aloof and criticize if one's own local Church is failing to serve the family. Join with other parents to transform the Church's program.

Chapter 9

Christian Beliefs and Child Training

We often hear it said that we live in a secular age. Now the secular man is not necessarily a man inferior in character or conduct, in culture or good will. In these qualities he may excel many religious men. The difference is that for the religious man God is his reference, while for the secular man God does not figure very largely in his thinking. For the secular man God is remote at best. Man, often viewed rather romantically and with too much optimism, is his standard and his ultimate guide. The secular life is organized apart from God, as if God did not exist.

For the religious man, God is present and acting in life. God is at the very center of life. To know and act upon the will of God is for the religious person the central motivating force in life.

Many present-day Christians are almost completely secular, but not quite so. They still keep God just outside the door of their lives in case of emergency. The rough-and-tumble world of man-made ideas, customs, and " gadgets " dominates their everyday living. God comes into view on Sunday and on occasion, but there is no real fellowship with him, no sense of his continual judgment on thought and word and deed,

no earnest seeking to know his will and lay hold on his power.

What Are Our Goals? It would seem wise, then, to suggest to parents that they ought honestly to ask themselves this question: Do I want my child to be essentially worldly and secular, or do I want his life to be God-centered and God-controlled?

Nearly all parents want their children to be men and women of character, respectable citizens, and good friends and neighbors. To this end most of them recognize the value of religion as a reinforcing agent. They want their children, as one mother put it, "to know all they can *about* religion." But do they want their children to be spiritually minded? That is a deeper question.

To be religious, in the minds of many, may be simply to conform to certain religious customs and conventions. But to be spiritual is to place God at the center of life. It is to make his will, so far as one can know it, the standard for thought and action. As we face the problems of guiding our children in their spiritual life, we need thus to examine our goals. What are we actually trying to accomplish?

Parents are the interpreters of the meaning and truth of Christianity to their children. They must be interpreters by word and by deed and by what they are. The teaching of ideas and beliefs, and even attention to certain forms and modes of conduct, will not tell their children so much about what it means to be Christian as their own lives. Therefore, the parent

must seek to know what it means to be Christian and to live as a Christian.

If parents are anxious that the great central truths of Christianity shall be real for their children and find expression in their lives, then they must realize that the spiritual foundations for a life with God are being laid in the experiences of everyday living. " The fundamental difference between a person who has fine *moral character* and one who has *Christian character,*" says Frances Cole McLester, " lies in the fact that . . . [a Christian] has a definite consciousness of his relationship to God, and makes a serious effort to identify himself with the purposes of God. This relationship will determine the quality of his living; it will influence vitally all his ideas and ideals and activities, and will affect every contact he has with other human beings. Communion with God and fellowship with Jesus are the basic or primary elements in the development of the truly Christian character."

Without any attempt to give a systematic discussion of Christian beliefs, and with full realization that there will be some repetition of ideas expressed in somewhat different form in earlier chapters, we shall show in this closing chapter how Christian beliefs and attitudes must become real in terms of teaching which is related to life experience.

God Is Love Christians believe that God is love. The foundation of this belief is the firsthand experience of love. Children must be loved, and they must know that they are loved. They must feel that the love

of parents is not an uncertain, erratic thing, but something as sure as tomorrow. And if it is to be sure, love must rest back upon something solid, which can only be a parent's faith in the goodness and purpose of life and the sustaining power of God.

Psychologists tell us that one of the basic needs of persons is the assurance of love, the certainty that one is really wanted and is valued for his own sake. The ultimate answer to this need is assurance of the love of God. It is always, finally, a religious problem. There is no love finally sufficient for all our needs except the love of God.

Parents lay the foundations of this assurance. The child who has never been sure of the love of family is often later beset with fear that he cannot trust the love of God.

Children must not only receive love; they must learn to give love. How can a real and compelling love of God be possible to the selfish, self-centered person who has not learned that life can find fulfillment only through the act of loving? For our children this cannot be achieved through admonishing them to be generous. They must learn the joy of giving and of sharing. They must have opportunities often to know the satisfaction of putting someone else in first place.

Affection calls forth affection. Many modern children are surfeited with indulgence of their desires and with kindness, but they lack the joy of a spontaneous and tender affection. Parents, you are the great interpreters of the love of God! Do not simply talk about it; show it.

Love Involves Justice Christians believe that God is not only a God of love; he is also a God of justice. These are not incompatible. In fact, they are inseparable. Yet for many persons the love of God and the justice of God are in apparent contradiction. They cannot reconcile suffering with love, or punishment with love.

If we want our children to understand the Christian view of God, we must exercise authority with great care. It is the parent's duty to help the child to learn that life demands discipline. A Christian life is a life of self-control and restraint. Parents must help their children to see and to profit by the consequences of wrong behavior. As they guide their children in making choices, they must let them gradually feel the consequences of their choices: the rewards of right choices, the disappointment and pain of wrong choices. It is not the parent's duty to shield children from life, but to help them to face it.

But from the Christian point of view the whole question of the parental authority and guidance rests back upon relationship to God. The parent is a person accountable before God for his relationship to every other person, including his children. The Christian view that children are a gift from God and parenthood a sacred trust is essential both to temper the pride and sustain the burdens in parenthood.

An outraged sense of justice colors the life of many a child. This may come from the parent's seeking to impose on the child a moral obligation and quality of living which the parent does not make binding

upon himself. Often this sense of injustice rises to plague later life in the shape of resentment and fear. Psychiatrists tell us that a deep sense of guilt disturbs the inner life of many a distraught and fearful soul who cannot believe in God or in man. Lack of fairness, which broke the bonds of affection between parent and child in childhood, has often laid the foundations for this loss of faith in life.

This balance of justice and love, or rather, this love which is large enough and discerning enough to include justice, is the one sure preparation for a life of faith in an ordered universe. To the fearful, guilt-ridden person, who is not sure of love, the universe is an awesome place indeed. Only he who has always known justice and love as inseparable can keep his faith in a God of love in a world like this.

Personality Is the Highest Value Christians believe in the infinite worth of persons. If we want our children to give more than lip service to this most distinctive quality of Christianity, we must build it into the very texture of their lives. That means that parents must set an example of genuine fair-dealing, sympathetic understanding, and love in all relationships with persons.

The attitudes of parents are more important than any superficial social graces, though good manners are of course important. Mutual respect between parents, true neighborliness, courtesy to all those who serve them in any way, these are the daily evidences of sincerity. A child was asked at camp if her family had

servants. She was puzzled at first, and then she said: "I don't think we have any servants. Of course we have Hannah, but she's just a friend." What a fine tribute not only to Hannah but to that child's parents!

If the child is to value persons, he must be valued as a person. His individual differences must be respected. His right to privacy and to individual tastes must be recognized. His personality must not be exploited for the pride or amusement or gain of others.

This Christian love of persons has a deep psychological basis of which parents ought to be mindful. The child who feels that he has been betrayed, misunderstood, or unfairly treated comes to resent people. The child whose ego has been harshly crushed is impelled to fight for a feeling of worth. He may seek to dominate or exploit others. In short, a wholesome experience of human fellowship, from babyhood up, is the foundation of brotherhood.

It would be helpful to parents in developing this love of persons if they would start where Jesus did. When he spoke of loving all persons, he did not debate the question as to whether all persons are lovable, or whether or not they deserve our love. He was not concerned first with love as a duty. He was aware that love is a positive, appreciative outpouring of life which purifies and sets free the spirits of those who give love. Love redeems others, but it redeems the lover first. Jesus was not so concerned to prove that love is the way to the hearts of men as that love is the way to the heart of God.

Of course, we want our children to develop judgment. We want them to see that a sentimental view of persons without reserve or distinction is of little value. But we also want them to know the joy of love which enriches and exalts life. We want them to be free from hate and resentment, prejudice and fear, which can only cramp and shrivel up their souls.

Loving and serving persons is not a way of appeasing God. It is a way of experiencing God and a way of fellowship with God.

" Ye Shall Know the Truth " Christians believe that man may know the truth and the truth shall set men free. We believe that God has revealed his truth in the Scriptures and in Jesus. If this is true, one of the prime duties of men is to seek to know this truth.

How many of us are thoughtfully and prayerfully day by day seeking God's revelation for ourselves? Or have we " settled down " behind the " Maginot line " of our traditional customs and habits and our comfortable opinions, with a stagnant indifference to the great epic issues of life? Most of us are well-informed. We have a great collection of facts. We know a little about many, many things. And every day we pile up more facts.

Often this maze of information is of little worth to our children. What they need is a pattern for living. To give them this design involves a constant search for the grounds of moral truth and certainty. Not public school alone, not the newspapers, not enlightened table conversations on the affairs of the day will give

them what they need. Only the reading of the Bible and other great literature, the practice of prayer, the earnest discussion of moral issues, and some meditation and quiet thought, will guide them to the truth.

Truth for living is more than facts and opinions and snap judgments. It is that which gives purpose to life, the deeper motivations, and a sense of ultimate goals. Says W. Macneile Dixon: " You need an interest, a motive, a center for your thought. You need a star to steer by, a cause, a creed, an idea, a passionate attachment. Something must beckon you or nothing is done."

Many modern men and women have become bewildered and have lost a sense of God. They look back wistfully to humble parents, who were woefully ignorant of science, perhaps, and who held many incorrect opinions, but who nevertheless had a sure knowledge of the meaning of life, a strong feeling of destiny, a sense of worth in the sight of God, and a clear judgment on right and wrong. The habit of seeking a sound basis for judgment and decision, and of looking for the real motives behind one's actions, must be laid down in childhood. A humble attitude toward truth and a sincere love of truth is the prerequisite of revelation.

Out of the Heart Are " the Issues of Life " Christians believe in the Holy Spirit working in men. They believe that the Spirit of God is at work in the world, and that men may open their hearts to his guidance and comfort.

How shall we make this Spirit of God meaningful to our children? We must begin early to teach them to listen to the voice of conscience. Is there not too much effort to control them from without by all sorts of restrictions, pressures, punishments and rewards, and not enough effort to help them to develop inner controls? The wise parent will begin to show his child that God does not care so much what the neighbors think we are; he sees what we really are. That means that parents must seek to understand the inner feelings of their children and not judge them by outer appearances.

God operates from within our being as well as from without. He is the companion of the inner life. As a man thinks in his heart, " so is he." To cultivate this inner life and develop its controls, we must know our children well. We must share the intimate, deep concerns of their growing lives. We must help them to know and understand themselves. But we are not worthy to tread these sanctuaries of their souls without God. Perhaps what is most needed is that we approach our children with the Spirit of God in our own hearts. We must know that whatever we do to shape and guide them we are working with the sacred stuff of life and the ground whereon we tread is holy ground.

" A Charge to Keep I Have " Christians believe in stewardship. Life is a gift from God. " The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." There is a deep spiritual principle involved in stewardship. Life, with

all its talents and possessions, is a trust. It is to be used and accounted for.

Stewardship is not only a practice with regard to things; it is an attitude toward the whole of life. It is a dedication of life to the purposes beyond the self and in line with the purposes of God.

Much of our teaching of stewardship is superficial. It consists of a mere sharing of money in the support of charity or the work of the Church. But the training of children in stewardship should be based upon the deeper spiritual motive of accountability before God for the whole of life. Children therefore should learn that ownership entails responsibility. They should find that wrong use or selfish use of possessions deprives them of privilege. They should not be allowed to waste.

Children should begin to learn very early that things are not an end in themselves, and that the possession of things is not a true mark of distinction. They can be taught and shown by example that what really matters is the way in which things are used to enrich our lives and the lives of others.

We live in a materialistic age. Overconcern with "getting and spending" has impoverished our spiritual life. Yet in the tragedy of these latter years, when men wantonly destroy the earth's riches and millions starve the world over, we have seen that it profits a man nothing if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul. The stewardship principle lies at the heart of our Christian conception of life and of the universe. It cannot be adequately taught simply by the

" pledge and envelope system " in the Sunday School. It is the Christian parent's duty to weave it into the very texture of family living.

" I Am the Way " Christians believe that Jesus is the Way of Life. In him we have the surest clue to the nature of God. In the Person of Jesus we have a revelation of the personality of God. We find God revealed, not only in the personality of Jesus, but in his teaching about God and in his own religious response to God. His trust in God and utter commitment to God are a clear portrayal of what man's right relationship to God should be.

" The heart of the Christian religion," says a contemporary theologian, " is an encounter with God." At the place of that encounter Jesus Christ is standing, Interpreter, Mediator, eternal Friend. " I am the way," means not only a way of life; it means a way opened to the heart of God. " God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." *Was* and *is*. This is a fact of history and a profound truth in human experience, ever renewed and relived in the personal experience of each one who finds his way to the cross. Man is saved by surrender to the divine initiative; the summation of that initiative is Christ.

It is this saving Christ that the Christian parent wants his child to find. He wants his child to grow up in the nurture of faith and never know himself separated from the love and mercy of God. And yet he knows that there must come, perhaps in the early teens, a time of decision and acceptance; a time of

wholehearted commitment and of determination to make the will of God as revealed in Christ the rule and practice of life.

A great religious leader has told us something of his personal experience of Jesus Christ: in early childhood, the gentle Jesus, loving and kind; in boyhood, the boy's Jesus, a Hero, strong and courageous; then Jesus the Example, the Model for life and thought, the Master of the art of living. In middle adolescence Jesus became the close Friend, the one who understood and cared. From this close friendship grew the rich experience of the Saviourhood of Jesus.

Perhaps that is the way for your child — through Friendship to Saviourhood. Most of us have had the joy, with pardonable pride, of introducing our children to some old friend. If the friendship is deep, this is a crucial moment. We want our children to know and appreciate our friend as we know and appreciate him. We want our friend to accept our children as a part of ourselves. Now, there is a greater Friend whom we want our children to know. Can we say " as we know him "?

True, this is a dangerous friendship. It makes demands. It asks for full surrender. It seeks to dominate all other friendships. But it can do what no other friendship can do. It has power " to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy."

No parent can face squarely the religious nurture of his child without recognizing that Jesus Christ is his Companion in this responsibility. He will recog-

nize that Christ can do for his child something that he cannot do, no matter how great his love and sacrifice. Before God they are both dependent children, confessing their shortcomings and leaning on the assurance of forgiveness which Christ has brought within the reach of man's poor comprehension. It is a long road of growth and experience from the beginning of life to the point where one may say " for to me to live is Christ." Let Christ be at the start of that road, and at its end, and a constant Companion on the way.

We have dealt at length in an earlier chapter with the place of Jesus in our teaching. May we only repeat here that this central place of Jesus in the religious life calls us over and over again to the task of making him real to our children as a constant Companion and as a Source of inspiration and help.

Conclusion We have tried to give in this chapter, in bare outline only, a few Christian beliefs and attitudes and to suggest their place in the guidance of children. Someone has given an excellent summary statement of what it means to be a Christian in these words: " To be a Christian is to be conformed inwardly in spirit and outwardly in conduct to the divine ideal as manifest in Jesus Christ."

Here is a goal for both parents and children. We hope this chapter has helped to sharpen your determination to lift all life to a spiritual level. For what we have sought to emphasize is the fact that as parents we are not concerned to add an alcove labeled " religion " to the structure of living, but to spiritualize the whole of life and consecrate it to the service of God.

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Personal Notes